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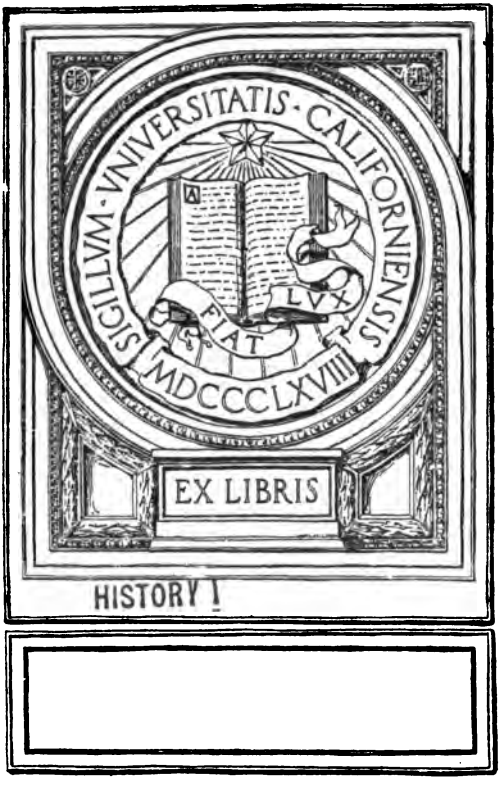

HISTORY

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Foreign Statesmen

MIRABEAU

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MIRABEAU

BY

P. F. WILLERT, M.A.

LATE FELLOW AND TUTOR OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD

London

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PREFACE

In the preface to a brilliant little biography of Mirabeau published in "Les grands Écrivains français" series (Hachette, 1891) M. Rousse tells us that everything we need wish to know about Mirabeau may be found in the memoirs published by M. Lucas de Montigny (8 vols., Delauney, 1835), in the exhaustive work of MM. Louis and Charles de Loménie (*Les Mirabeau*, 5 vols., Dentu, 1878-1891), and in the correspondence between Mirabeau and La Marck edited by M. de Bacourt (2 vols., Meline, Cans, and Cie., 1851). If we add to these works the *Souvenirs sur Mirabeau* of Dumont (1 vol., Bossange, 1832) and the life of Mirabeau written by Professor Alfred Stern (*Das Leben Mirabeaus*, 2 vols., Cronbach, 1889), this last the most complete, impartial, and interesting biography of the orator existing, we are not likely, when endeavouring to acquaint ourselves with Mirabeau, to be led into error by want of knowledge of the facts or of competent guidance. Yet we shall only be learning to know him as he appears to the

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eyes of others. Long extracts from his letters and works are indeed given by M. de Montigny, but they are carefully selected and arranged to produce the impression desired by the piety of the "adopted son." The two volumes of M. de Bacourt contain Mirabeau's letters to La Marck, Lafayette, and others, as well as his notes for the Court; but in this correspondence he is less the real Mirabeau than the Mirabeau he wishes to be thought by those whom he addresses.

Dumont, no doubt, gives us a good and authentic portrait, but he is rather disposed to represent Mirabeau as a wonderful and mighty machine set in motion by himself and his Swiss friends, and to ignore the pre-eminence of genius which employed him and them as pliant and serviceable tools. M. Charles de Loménie is biassed against his hero, and although too conscientious to be guilty of anything approaching to misrepresentation, he, to say the least, is neither blind nor kind to his faults.

Even Professor Stern, who can scarcely be surpassed for judicial fairness and sane judgment, occasionally "imputes himself." This, indeed, seems to me the error into which it is all but impossible not to fall when passing judgment on the life of a man such as Mirabeau, swayed by the most various impulses, uninfluenced by any religious or moral principles, unsoured by any grain of conscience. It is difficult not to argue "What a scoundrel should I be were I to act thus: therefore what a scoundrel was he!" Not at all. If we may use

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the language of the schools, for him the major premiss of the moral syllogism did not exist.

The reader's knowledge of Mirabeau is likely, therefore, to be more complete and more immediate if in addition to the books already mentioned he will also read the *Letters from Vincennes* published by Manuel (4 vols., Garnery, 1792), and the *Œuvres de Mirabeau, Discours et Opinions* (9 vols., edited by Merilhon, 1826). As I have said elsewhere, it is when reading the *Letters from Vincennes* that we seem to be brought most nearly into something like personal contact with the author, to realise what manner of man he was, and to understand the fascination which he exercised over all who met him, except pedants and prigs like Necker and Lafayette.

I do not know that much of importance has been written in English about Mirabeau, except an essay by Macaulay (*Miscellaneous Writings*, vol. ii. p. 70, edition 1860). The compound name coined for him after his own fashion by Macaulay—Wilkes-Chatham—is by itself alone worth the whole of Carlyle's fanciful rhapsody (*Miscellanies*, vol. v. p. 201, edition of 1872).

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CHAPTER I

The Family and Parentage of Mirabeau.

MADAME DE STAËL, in her often-quoted description of the first meeting of the Estates-General in 1789, remarks that of the men of letters, the merchants, the numerous lawyers, and few nobles who were the chosen representatives of the Commons of France scarcely any were known and none celebrated except the Count of Mirabeau. He alone attracted the eyes of all spectators, and, once seen, arrested their attention. His vast shock of hair made him conspicuous among the crowd. His very ugliness added to the impressive vigour of his countenance, "swart, prodigious, patched with foul moles and eye-offending marks," but instinct with indomitable energy and conscious power. The fear inspired by his unprincipled character strangely heightened the general opinion of his ability. Other eye-witnesses have recorded that, when this striking figure was recognised among the deputies of Provence, the applause with which they at first were greeted sank in a murmur of disapprobation.

"In every company of every rank," wrote Arthur Young a few days later, "you hear of the Count of

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Mirabeau's talents, that he is one of the first pens of France and the first orator, and yet that he could not carry from confidence six votes on any question in the Estates." Mirabeau was indeed far more than the first orator: he was the greatest statesman, or rather the only great statesman, in that body to which the future destinies of France were committed. "When words only are needed," said his friend the Count of La Marck, "there is no lack of talents in this assembly, but when something more than words is required, you have no rival." He did indeed combine nearly every qualification of a consummate politician. A strong and practical intellect unfettered by phrases, formulas, and systems, versatility in the choice and adaptation of means, a clear and tenacious grasp of the end to be attained, skill in the management of men, a marvellous power of influencing and winning the confidence of those who were brought into personal relations with him, an insight into the future which attained to something little short of prophecy. "Mirabeau," says Madame de Staël, "knew everything and foresaw everything." The great orator has often been represented as the prime agent in the Revolution, as the very incarnation of the revolutionary spirit, and indeed that wonderful time, when the disappearance of all barriers left a free field to every ambition and every ability, produced but one other who could compare with him as a born leader and chief of men. Yet, had Mirabeau never existed, the French Revolution would probably have run the same course; had his life been protracted the event would have been the same, the ruin of the Monarchy not less tragic and complete.

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Private and even public vices have not proved obstacles to the ambition of men far more criminal and not less profligate. In public life Mirabeau had, as we shall see, principles, and to these principles he was essentially faithful; nor was he without private virtues, or at least such amiable qualities as pass current for virtues in social intercourse. It would be unjust to compare him with an unscrupulous time-server like Talleyrand, or even, as was done by his father, to a mischievous and entirely selfish intriguer like the Cardinal de Retz, and he would certainly have recoiled with horror from such a crime as the execution of the Duke of Enghien. How came it, then, that talents so great proved so unprofitable to him who was endowed with them, and of so little service to his country? The answer to this question is to be found not in anything that Mirabeau said or did after he had become a member of the Assembly, but in the circumstances of his previous life.

Gabriel Honoré de Riqueti was born on the 9th of March 1749 at Le Bignon, near Nemours, the favourite residence of his father, the Marquis of Mirabeau, the disciple and successor of Quesnai, renowned, and at that time still admired, as "the Friend of Humanity." Gabriel Honoré was the fifth child and the second son. His elder brother had died in his third year from drinking the contents of an inkhorn, the victim of a taste strangely abnormal, though not without a certain appropriateness in the child of a family singularly addicted to the use and abuse of that liquid.

No Montmorency or Rohan could exceed the Marquis of Mirabeau in pride of birth. The orator was fond of

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repeating, if indeed he did not invent, his father's boast that an intermarriage with the Medici was the only blot on his scutcheon. Yet the descent of the Riquets—for such was the original name of the family—from Arrighettis, noble exiles from Florence who settled in Provence during the thirteenth century, seems to have been a baseless invention. At a time when the Medici were intermarrying with princes and kings, the founder of the family of Mirabeau was a thriving citizen of Marseilles, who amassed a fortune by trading in coral and manufacturing cloth, while he raised himself in public estimation by an aristocratic marriage and the capable discharge of municipal office. This Jean Riquet or Riqueti bought in 1570 the estate and castle of Mirabeau, a fief of the old Provençal family of Barras.

In 1660 Thomas de Riqueti entertained Lewis XIV. in his house at Marseilles. Honoré, the son of Thomas, was created Marquis of Mirabeau in 1685. Great personal beauty, more than common talents, hot blood, overweening pride, and self-complacent eccentricity were the characteristics of the family during the eighteenth century. But the Friend of Humanity went too far when he boasted that the world had been learning during five hundred years to tolerate Mirabeaus, who were not as other men. The respectable country gentlemen who, during the seventeenth century, intermarried with the old houses of Provence, did nothing to startle the world. The first original in the family appears to have been one Bruno de Riqueti, who commanded a company in the musketeers of Lewis XIV. "Bruno," said his great nephew, the father of Mirabeau, "had as much wit as courage, but was mad, insolent, and vicious."

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The next generation to Bruno produced a Mirabeau who would have been famous if indomitable courage and extravagant pride could secure fame. This is that Jean Antoine, Marquis of Mirabeau, whose life, written by his son the economist in the vigorous, straightforward, and racy style which he unfortunately considered to be beneath the dignity of his philosophical speculations, was plagiarised by his grandson the orator.

A favourite officer of the Duke of Vendôme, the Marquis of Mirabeau served with distinction in many campaigns, fighting with reckless valour. At Cassano he was shot through the arm and neck, and lay among the dead while the tide of battle rolled over his body. A lucky chance stopped the hæmorrhage of a wound which had injured the jugular vein, and a desperate operation saved his life. But the tendons of the neck were so cut that the Marquis could henceforth only hold up his head by the assistance of a silver band or stock. Although he called the day of Cassano that of his death, he was still singularly handsome, and it does not appear strange that he should have been the successful suitor of a Provençal beauty—Françoise de Castellane-Norante—or if strange, not because of his forty-two years and scarcely less numerous scars, but on account of the reputation he had gained for extravagant self-assertion and choleric obstinacy. Françoise de Castellane bore her lord seven children, of whom only three boys were living when their father died at the age of seventy-one.

Of the eldest of these sons the biographer of Mirabeau, however narrow the limits to which he is confined, must speak at some length: for unless we know his

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father it is impossible to understand the son; the younger must be dismissed in a few lines. Yet the temptation to linger is great; among the French nobility of the eighteenth century few characters can be found as attractive as that of the second son, Jean Antoine, Bailli de Mirabeau. It has justly been said that his life was as simple, as straightforward, as full of practical common sense, of unaffected heroism and self-sacrifice as that of his eldest brother was artificial, pedantic, egotistical, and confused by chimerical schemes the offspring of an extravagant self-conceit.

Received soon after his birth into the order of Malta, he began when only thirteen his naval career on the royal galleys. For twenty years he was almost constantly engaged in active service, repeatedly wounded, and once taken prisoner. Post-captain at thirty-three, he was shortly afterwards appointed Governor of Guadeloupe. On his return he might have become Minister of Marine through the influence of the Abbé de Bernis, the friend of the Marquis of Mirabeau and of Madame de Pompadour, had it not been known that he meditated reforms alarming to the official world. The Marquis made the one good investment of his life when he found the 150,000 livres which enabled his brother to defray for a year the expenses of the office of general of the galleys of Malta, and thus to secure a claim to the next good commandery vacant. In addition to this he obtained two other benefices, and the grand-mastership of the order appeared to be within his grasp, when, finding that his brother wished him to come home, he left Malta. Henceforth he lived chiefly at Mirabeau, supplying the place of the absentee master, and

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assisting his brother with his advice, his sympathy, and his purse. Although his income was close upon 70,000 livres, the only luxury he permitted himself was the collection of a fine library. Mirabeau used to declare that his uncle had but one weakness, his affectionate faith in his brother. It would be more just to say that nothing we are told about the Marquis does him so much credit as the unchanging love and confidence between the brothers.

The elder, Victor de Riqueti, Marquis of Mirabeau, was born on 4th October 1715. He was educated by the Jesuits at Aix till his fourteenth year, when he obtained a commission in the regiment his father had commanded.

After serving a year Victor de Mirabeau was sent to an academy at Paris: one of those establishments in which young nobles were taught the accomplishments of a soldier and a gentleman—riding, fencing, dancing, and in their spare hours some smattering of polite letters.

He had taken the precaution to suppress a letter from his father to the head of the academy authorising and asking for strict discipline. He was accordingly allowed to do pretty much what he pleased, and what pleased him was not edifying. His excesses were, he confesses, surprising at so early an age, and they entailed the natural consequences — an illness, from which he soon recovered, and an empty purse, which his father refused to fill. In the winter of 1731 a strange figure was often to be seen in the pit of Parisian theatres—a boy of remarkable beauty, with clear-cut features, bold eyes, and hair streaming in long elf-locks

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below his shoulders, the cross of a knight of Malta hanging over his tattered clothes, who with his companions disturbed actors and audience by noisy disapprobation and tumultuous applause. The ragged young reprobate became the favoured lover of an actress hardly older than himself, from whom in the following summer he parted with tears and despair to take the command of a company in his regiment.

Licentiousness carried to the verge of erotic mania was the vice which proved the curse of Mirabeau, which blunted his sense of honour and degraded though it could not dull his powerful intellect. This failing of the great tribune may be explained, perhaps even pitied, as an hereditary taint. His father's youth was exceptionally dissolute, even for the eighteenth century. He himself laments his degradation in a letter, written when he was twenty-five, to his friend the moralist Vauvenargues:—"Sensuality is the bane of my imagination. I shall dearly rue my follies and that licentiousness which has become my second nature."

The Marquis Jean Antoine died in 1737. His property was embarrassed by unfortunate speculations and by a taste for ostentation; yet he left his successor a net income of 16,000 livres, sufficient for a country gentleman content to live quietly on his estate, though very insufficient for one who aspired to play the part of a great noble, and whose head was full of schemes for improving his property which were to be an example to others and the means of obtaining the wealth which should enable the Mirabeaus to occupy their proper place in the world.

After several campaigns the young marquis left the

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army (1743) and reflected that he owed it to the future greatness of his house to marry an heiress. A friend suggested the only daughter of M. de Vassan—a general officer who had assumed the title of marquis in right of his wife, the owner of estates in the Limousin, in Poitou, and in Perigord. Although he had known the father for five years and had formed the meanest opinion of his character and capacity, the imagination of the Marquis of Mirabeau was fired by the prospect of acquiring broad domains scattered over a wide area, and thus raising his family "from provincial to national importance."

The father and mother of the heiress would only give their daughter an income of 4000 livres, secured on a fief in Perigord; they refused to settle even the reversion of their estates upon her. But nothing could damp the ardour of the suitor. Disregarding the remonstrances of his lawyer, he persisted in signing the marriage contract, and, as if the most passionate of lovers, hurried off next day to his unseen bride who was living in the Limousin with her mother. The marriage was immediately celebrated, but not before the Marquis had discovered that his mother-in-law's mind was unsound: she had, he says, been in a madhouse before the birth of her daughter; her temper perverse—"the most irritable and irritating woman in the world"; and that the education of his bride had been detestable.

Marie Geneviève de Vassan appears at the time of her marriage to have been an ignorant girl, half educated, spoilt by a weakly obstinate mother and a foolish father, with violent passions and ill-balanced mind, inheriting,

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as her husband complains, all the faults of her odious parentage. If an extant portrait is to be trusted, she was not altogether bad-looking, but the expression of her face was sensual and impudent. She was not without wit and could be vivacious, but her chatter was unrestrained by any tact or sense of propriety. She was always, says the Marquis, in extremes, sulkily morose or petulantly loquacious, indolent, slatternly, without modesty or decency. This and much more, in extraordinary and repulsive detail, is written by him to a married daughter; and what must we think of the father who in a letter of advice to his child points his moral by a description of the follies and vices of her mother?

The intermittent but exacting fondness of his wife, her not unreasonable jealousy and anger, were equally irritating to the Marquis. He proposed an amicable separation; her father was dead, she might live with and take care of her mother. At first she refused, but at length, when the health of Madame de Vassan was failing, and the disposition she would make of her property uncertain, the Marchioness was persuaded to go to her mother. In her absence the Marquis discovered proofs of his wife's dishonour, "of shame over which an honourable man could not throw his cloak," so indisputable that she could no longer refuse her consent to a formal separation. She undertook not to come to Paris or in any way molest her husband on condition of receiving a moderate allowance.

Unfortunately Madame de Mirabeau was an inveterate gambler and a very foolish one, the born prey of sharpers and adventurers. She anticipated her allowance and ran into debt. The creditors plagued

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her husband, who deducted payments made to quiet them from her income. Hence complaints that he did not perform his part of the compact. To prevent further scandal and to secure himself against annoyance, the Marquis applied for and obtained from a minister related to his wife a *lettre de cachet* confining her to a convent at Limoges.

He had some years previously denounced an abuse of arbitrary power, the victims of which were imprisoned without form of trial and often ignorant both of their offence and of their accuser. He himself would never —so he wrote—have recourse to such an odious instrument of oppression while laws and law-courts, however defective, existed. Yet this was to be the first of the long series of *lettres de cachet* by which a philosophic and humanitarian marquis, fallen on evil days, sought to maintain some authority over his perverse generation.

Every year the Marquis drew up a domestic budget with an explanatory preamble justifying to his posterity his administration of the family fortunes. Occasionally he has misgivings, but on the whole he applauds his financial skill, which, like that of the French Government, consisted in paying one debt by incurring another and a heavier. He seems to have felt, like many a systematic prodigal, that the sting of a deficit is gone when set forth in an elaborate balance-sheet. But every year his net income dwindled, and at last it altogether disappeared, although the gross income which he derived from his estates increased, owing to the rise in the value of landed property, which continued from the end of the Seven Years' War to the Revolution.

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An expenditure which always exceeded his income, a taste for building and for costly and experimental improvements, the wish to increase the importance of his family by buying land with money borrowed at a higher rate of interest than could possibly be hoped from the investment, unsuccessful litigation and an extravagant family, might well account for the ruin of a more solidly established fortune. But for the liberal assistance of his brother the Marquis of Mirabeau might have starved.

Even before his wife had left him he had found elsewhere the comfort and sympathy she could not give. His connection with Madame de Pailly, a clever and attractive Swiss lady married to an elderly countryman who had served in the Swiss Guards, was not of a kind to be condemned by the public opinion of the day. The forms of propriety were observed. The most respectable friends of the Marquis, the Countess of Rochefort and her subsequent husband the Duke of Nivernois, admitted Madame de Pailly to their intimacy. But the part of extralegal stepmother was not an easy one to play, even for a woman as full of tact as Madame de Pailly undoubtedly was. It could not but be that occasions of offence would arise as the children of her friend grew up.

We may now perhaps form some notion of the influences which were to shape the childhood and youth of the future statesman. A father, as Carlyle describes him, "of the pedant species, his pedantry carried to such a pitch as becomes sublime," with "an endless unfathomable pride, which cloaks and nowise extinguishes an endless vanity"; always satisfied that he

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saw farther and more clearly than any one else, and always expressing his impressions without reticence in the most trenchant and forcibly graphic language; capable indeed of seeing either side of a question or of a character with singular insight, but quite incapable of seeing more than one side at a time. A mother indolent, slovenly, frivolous, and passionate; indulgent to her children, not from affection, but from indifference or out of opposition to her husband. The demoralising experience of a strange disregard of reticence and decency on the part of both parents, and of constant bickerings and quarrels, which as time went on became more and more open and unseemly, until they ended in a complete rupture, and the mother's place was taken by a stranger, who, whatever her merits, was in a position so false that although she might attempt good she was certain only to do mischief. Even had Gabriel Honoré de Riqueti been born a docile child of gentle temper and with little original corruption of nature, it would have been sanguine to augur much good from an education carried on under such conditions. His younger brother, "Barrel" Mirabeau, whose childhood caused his father little anxiety, and who seems to have combined an amiable disposition with considerable talents, turned out a dissipated spendthrift. The daughters of the family, three of whom survived childhood, cannot be quoted as proving anything for or against the influences of their home. They were from an early age immured in a convent. The eldest took the veil and died insane. The next sister, Madame du Saillant, was married at sixteen and became the mother of eighteen

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girls and one boy; gentle and affectionate, the most soothing woman in the world, says her uncle the Bailli, she was a comfort to her father, and, assisted by her husband, acted the part of a peacemaker in the family quarrels. The third daughter, Madame de Cabris, beautiful, witty, and worthless, was a firebrand; and as she at one time had been her father's favourite child, so when she turned against him she became the object of his deepest aversion. His eldest son, he complained, was a mischievous madman without conduct or principles, but his heart was not wholly bad; his youngest daughter's diabolical malice was inspired by her corrupt and unfeeling heart.

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CHAPTER II

The education of Mirabeau—In disgrace with his father—Campaign in Corsica—Reconciliation with the Marquis—Marriage—First *lettre de cachet*—Castle of If and Pontarlier—Elopement with Sophie de Monnier—Vincennes.

To assist him in the education of his son—for his literary work, his position as a leader of thought, as a reformer, and as a man of the world left him little leisure to devote to his children—the Marquis of Mirabeau found a tutor of unimpeachable economic orthodoxy, one Poirson, a worthy man apparently, who spared no pains in forcing all he knew into the receptive head of his pupil, and endeavoured to carry out conscientiously his patron's system of education. A child precocious in body and mind, overflowing with life and energy, and, like his father, passing rapidly from mood to mood, was kept under the severest discipline, drilled and driven, and so far as it lay in the power of father and tutor never for one moment allowed to be himself. It was in vain that the Bailli told his brother that this system of compression might end in a startling explosion, and that comparative strangers like the Baron of Gleichen bade him beware lest he should manufacture a scoundrel out of the materials meant by nature for a great man.

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Nothing could shake his confidence in Poirson or in his own method.

When Mirabeau was only five his father writes "that his knowledge is the wonder of Paris, that he has few vices but no feeling—he is mere sand, keeping no impression"; a few days later "that he has suddenly become roguish, inquisitive, and meddlesome, a pretty handful, but a strict watch is kept over him." A little afterwards he despairs of ever training him into a Mirabeau, but as for his favourite vice, lying, he shall unlearn it or he will disown him. He was scarcely ten when the Marquis complained "my eldest boy will sell his name," but a month afterwards declared "that there remains in him no trace of temper, baseness, or untruthfulness." Then again: "He is one whom you may call ill-born, who hitherto promises to become nothing but a madman; almost invincibly maniac, with all the vile qualities of the maternal stock into the bargain. As he has a great many masters, and all from the confessor to his playfellows are so many reporters to me, I see the nature of the beast, and do not think we shall ever make anything of him."

By the time Mirabeau was fifteen his father complained that Poirson could do nothing with so perverse a creature. Accordingly Gabriel Honoré, no longer Count of Mirabeau, lest he should discredit the name, but Baron of Pierre Buffière, a fief of his mother's, was sent to Versailles to be under the care of a M. de Sigrais, a soldier and a scholar. M. de Sigrais received his pupil with the worst of characters. The Marquis never failed, wherever his son went, to describe him beforehand as the most abandoned and hopeless though plausible

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scoundrel. He soon wrote to his brother complaining of the want of insight and weakness of the tutor. "He is under the charm, he is fascinated. He extols his prodigious memory which can contain all things, yes, as sand receives every impression and loses it as quickly, he magnifies his kindheartedness, which is nothing but cheap and flabby good-nature towards his inferiors, who make him feel at his ease and to whom he is attracted by his instinctive meanness: he praises his cleverness—which is that of a poll parrot. In short he is completely ruining him, and I shall see to this at once."

M. de Pierre Buffière was accordingly removed from Versailles and sent to Paris to the academy of the Abbé Choquard, "a stern man and one who knew when needful to punish severely." Choquard's Academy was a fashionable establishment and in good repute. The physical education of the boys was promoted by the most varied exercises, from boxing to the elaborate horsemanship of the *haute école*, from French ballet-dancing to Prussian drill. While intellectually what could be more advanced in the eyes of the Marquis than a school where the truths to be derived from the Tableau Économique of Quesnai were expounded by a disciple of the Friend of Humanity? Here Pierre Buffière was allowed to remain for two years, winning prizes and not apparently suffering any of those punishments to which his father had hopefully looked forward. We have a description of the impression he made on his schoolfellows in a letter written long afterwards by one of them, Gilbert Elliot, the first Lord Minto, to his brother Hugh after meeting Mirabeau in London. "I was agreeably surprised by a visit from our old and

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persecuted schoolfellow Mirabeau. I found him as ardent a friend as I left him and as little altered as possible by twenty years of life, of which six have been consumed in prison and the rest in personal and domestic trouble. He is as overbearing in his conversation, as awkward in his graces, as ugly and as misshapen in face and person, as dirty in his dress, and withal as perfectly *suffisant* as we remember him twenty years ago at school. I loved him, however, then and so did you, though, as he confesses, you sometimes quarrelled with him, being always somewhat less patient in admitting extreme pretensions than me."

Mirabeau was now seventeen, an age when it was necessary that a young noble should begin his military career. His father took great pains in the selection of a regiment, and could not possibly have made a worse choice. The regiment of Berri-Cavalerie was commanded by the Marquis of St. Lambert, a young and distinguished officer but a strict and pedantic martinet, and a convinced physiocrat, constant in attendance at the meetings of the sect. What a heaven-sent chance! A cavalry colonel of economic orthodoxy, who would severely punish the slightest irregularity of conduct! Could any young man, not hopelessly perverse, go wrong under such a commanding officer?

During a year's service with his regiment in garrison at Saintes, Pierre Buffière quarrelled with his colonel, spent many days under arrest, seduced a policeman's daughter, and finally, on the complaint of St. Lambert, was imprisoned by order of the minister of war in the island of Rhé. Hence loud outcries from his father, lamentations and talk of sending the vicious incurable

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prodigal to Surinam or some other tropical colony, where, if the climate did not soon relieve the family from this disgrace, his misdoings would no longer disturb the paternal philosophy. The Friend of Humanity had apparently forgotten the boyish knight of Malta, the frequenter of pothouses, the terror of theatrical audiences, the lover of Mademoiselle Dangeville, the memory of whom might have taught him a little more indulgence to the first excesses of his son.

The governor of Rhé had been prepared to receive his prisoner by the usual letter of introduction, couched, so the Marquis thought, in very moderate terms, since he only described his son as hot-headed, utterly perverse, and a liar by instinct. But the gaoler yielded to his prisoner's singular power of personal fascination—a power, grumbled his father, which alone made it desirable in the public interest that he should be hanged. His captivity was easy, and at the end of six months the intercession of the governor obtained for him his release and a commission in an expedition against Corsica (April 1769).

In Corsica M. de Pierre Buffière served in such a way as to obtain the warm approbation of his superior officers. His major long afterwards declared he had never met a man with greater natural aptitude for military command than the Count of Mirabeau. This was his own opinion, for he boasted that he had completely mastered the art of war and had acquainted himself with all that had ever been written on the subject, also that he possessed every quality of a great soldier—calm intrepidity, quick perception, prompt decision.

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The Bailli de Mirabeau was not wanting in insight. He was prejudiced against his nephew, but after he had seen him on his return through Provence he loudly celebrates his acquirements and talents. "If not worse than Nero he will be better than Marcus Aurelius. . . . If he is not the cleverest impostor in the world he will be the best material to be found for Pope, Commander by sea and land, Lord Chancellor, or even agriculturist. You were something when twenty-two, but not half of what he is." The Marquis received these rhapsodies coolly. Perhaps his suspicions of his brother's judgment were excusable, since he found that Mirabeau shared his uncle's enthusiasm for feudalism, thought no profession so noble as the Navy, and pencil in hand took careful notes of the Bailli's instructive conversation.

He bade his brother be on his guard against the golden tongue of the plausible prodigal, to beware lest while he was trying to be his guide on the path of honour the rascal should find an opportunity of emptying his pockets. If his repentance was really sincere, let him apply himself to the study of physiocratic wisdom as expounded in the paternal books, and to the practical application on the estate of Mirabeau of the true principles of rural economy, discoverable in the same works. The Bailli joyfully wrote that his nephew had borne even this test, the political economy had indeed proved a little hard of digestion, but no practical work came amiss to Pierre Buffière or surpassed his capacity.

When this discipline had lasted three months the Marquis allowed himself to be in some measure appeased. He was willing to see his son, who might again style himself Count of Mirabeau. The Friend of Humanity

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was on the whole satisfied with his repentant prodigal. He marvelled at his power of work, his exuberant energy and vitality. The Bailli had suggested that it would be well for him to marry: but where could a suitable wife be found? The Czarina Catherine might have been a match for him, but who else? Perhaps he was best fitted for a soldier's life, but it was a time of peace, and the tedious idleness of garrison life in some provincial town would be the ruin of a nature so restless, so open to temptations of every kind. He made some attempts to obtain active service for him as a volunteer in Hungary or elsewhere, but without success.

Meantime Mirabeau lived on at home, and sought in every way to propitiate his father, whose agent he became in negotiations with his mother, with whom he had previously professed to sympathise; and whom, when he again became her ally, he addressed in terms of the warmest affection. He now spoke of her with a frank contempt, most unseemly in the mouth of a son, to be explained but not excused by the indecency with which the Marquis exposed the frailties of his wife to her children.

He was next sent to maintain his father's seigniorial rights at Mirabeau. There were scarcely, he wrote after his arrival, six nobles in Provence who were not at law with their vassals. The peasantry resented any strict enforcement of their feudal obligations and sought to extend their common rights to the utmost. The future champion of the third estate is said to have treated his father's vassals with insolence and harshness. He himself claims to have acted with singular forbearance, and that he was unpopular during his residence

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at Mirabeau does not prove the charges brought against him.

It was towards the end of 1771 that Mirabeau had been sent to the South. In the beginning of that year his father wrote of him with satisfaction, almost with enthusiasm: "My son now deserves my confidence. He is a very demon for performing impossibilities." We are reminded of Mirabeau's answer to his secretary: "Impossible! let me never hear that foolish word." The Marquis as a token of his favour had allowed him to visit Versailles. He dwells complacently on his son's success as a courtier, boasts that he was as sociable as he himself was reserved, that he had a terrible gift of familiarity, found his way into every circle, claimed cousinship with Guémenées, Carignans, Noailles, and the rest, button-holed old Maurepas, astonished the hangers-on of the Court, upset the dignity of dowagers, and was generally thought as wild as an unentered hound. This is very probable, but we must for once suspect the Marquis of parental partiality when he adds that Mirabeau's deportment was respectful without servility, easy but not familiar, that he never presumed, "usurped nothing and obtained all."

Marriage with an heiress who had nothing to recommend her but her expectations, had proved so miserable a failure in the case of the Marquis that we should scarcely have expected to find the experiment repeated in the next generation.

Yet as early as the summer of 1770 the Bailli, spending the season at Aix, cast his eye on the greatest heiress of Provence, Marie Margaret Émilie de Covet de Marignane, as a suitable match for his nephew. In

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September of the same year Madame de Cabris wrote to her brother: "I warn you as a friend that Mademoiselle de Marignane is engaged to the son of the President d'Albertas. You have not been quick enough. But don't grieve, she is hideous and very short." At the end of 1771 Mirabeau found the young lady still unmarried, though anxious to escape from the tutelage of her grandmother. Her mother was dead. Her father lived the life of an indolent man of pleasure. He troubled himself little about his daughter, and left the choice of her husband to be decided by her own caprice and by the intrigues of her relatives. The number of suitors and the conflicting views of the family as to their merits enabled Mirabeau to carry away the prize from the flower of the gilded youth of Aix, who were attracted rather by the future wealth of Mademoiselle de Marignane than by her personal attractions: yet these were not so absolutely wanting as Madame de Cabris would have had her brother believe. She was, it is true, small, swarthy, and crooked; but her dark eyes were lively and expressive, her hair magnificent, she had a fine voice and sang well. She had at least two tastes, music and extravagance, in common with her future husband. If not witty, she possessed the vivacity and high spirits which may pass for wit, and a talent for mimicry which enabled her to tell stories, many of them over broad, very divertingly.

The Marquis, who had looked coldly on his son's wooing, made a provision for him which was not illiberal when his embarrassed circumstances are taken into account. Besides handsome presents to his daughter-in-law, he settled on the young couple an income of 6000

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livres which was to rise by annual additions of 500 l. to 8500 l. They could live rent free at Mirabeau, where their table might be supplied by the produce of the estate and of Mirabeau's gun, for he was an indefatigable sportsman and game was plentiful. The Marquis of Marignane was more stingy. An annuity of 3000 l. was a very poor dowry for the heiress of extensive and unencumbered estates.

Unfortunately Mirabeau possessed all the qualities and inclinations which enable a man to ruin himself in the shortest possible time—love of display, the costly tastes of a man of pleasure and of a virtuoso, the most childish and improvident profusion. By the time he had been married fifteen months his debts amounted to some 200,000 l., he had pawned his wife's jewels, and had begun to cut down the timber at Mirabeau.

The Marquis, who at first augured little good from his son's marriage, had become more hopeful. He was charmed by the letters of his daughter-in-law. The birth of a little Victor delighted him and was celebrated by illuminations and rustic festivities at Le Bignon, his residence near Paris, suitable to an Arcadia *à la* Jean Jacques. The idyllic dreams of the poor Friend of Humanity were rudely broken. Letters came from the President of the Parliament of Aix and from M. de Marignane filled with accounts of the extravagance and misdeeds of Mirabeau—his prodigalities, his debaucheries, his insolence, his violence, for he had hustled the President d'Albertas in the streets of Aix, affecting to scorn the spurious Maupéou Parliament. He was even more lavish of his blows than of his money. Servants fled from him, no bailiff dared approach him. He was

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in the hands of the Jews, wrote his father-in-law, and something must be done to save him. Indeed he had himself told the family lawyer that sooner than be left to the mercy of his creditors, he would beg his father to obtain a *lettre de cachet* committing him to the Castle of If or any other fortress.

It was clear therefore he would regard as a favour a royal order which confined him to Mirabeau. M. de Marignane begged the Marquis to obtain such an order as speedily as possible. Once "in the king's hands," the prodigal would no longer be liable to arrest for debt, and it would be possible to effect a compromise with the Jews; there would also be less opportunity for further extravagance. In his disappointment the Marquis protested that the scoundrel deserved to be left to rot on the straw of a debtor's prison, but finally consented to apply for the desired order forbidding the Count to leave the Castle of Mirabeau; and afterwards on reports, false or exaggerated, of misdoings in his ancestral home, sale of furniture, waste of timber, and the like, for another *lettre de cachet* ordering him to betake himself to, and remain at, the neighbouring little town of Manosque.

These royal orders, afterwards cited as proofs of paternal cruelty and oppression, were, it is obvious, desired by Mirabeau as a protection against his creditors. As the king's prisoner he was secured against any civil or criminal action. His family also obtained a sentence from the Châtelet of Paris "*interdicting*" him as a prodigal, *i.e.* rendering him incapable of contracting debts and of concluding any monetary contract. This he protested against at the time as unjust and degrading. Yet he never took any steps to be relieved from the

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disability. He no doubt found it convenient to be so far an outlaw that his creditors had no legal remedy against him. At the time of his funeral the bill for his wedding-suit was still unpaid.

At Manosque the Mirabeaus lodged in the house of friends, whose son was at home on leave from his regiment. In the monotonous dulness of a little country town an intrigue with a young woman, who was not without attractive social gifts, was a pleasant diversion to a youthful musketeer. Madame de Mirabeau was weak in character and had been ill educated among domestic examples of lax morality; whatever principles she may have had were shaken by the example of her husband's libertinage and by the pains he had taken to emancipate her from the prejudices of a religion disdained by his philosophy. It is not therefore strange that she should have yielded to a passing caprice.

A letter which fell into Mirabeau's hands acquainted him with his wife's infidelity. However superior he might be to prejudices, the discovery was mortifying. He seems at this time to have been really attached to his wife, and in any case such treachery must have wounded his self-esteem. That he determined to pardon the offence is less a proof of insensibility than of self-control and of a natural equity which prevented him from feeling greatly indignant with others for not observing in their actions a higher standard of morals than his own, and to which, as well as to a disposition not easily moved to lasting anger or hatred, we may ascribe the singular absence of revengeful or rancorous feelings which distinguished him both in public and in private life. He insisted that his wife should dismiss

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her lover in a letter which was to be returned to him, and of which he afterwards made an unfortunate use. He wrote himself to the faithless friend, overwhelming him, so he thought, by his indignant virtue, contemptuous magnanimity, and withering scorn. As we read this effusion, we seem to be listening to St. Preux seeking to obtain damages against a seducer of his Julie from the virtuous sympathy of a jury of Parisian shopkeepers.

It may have been a prudent wish to secure her from further temptation, rather than a sublime impulse to return good for evil, which prompted Mirabeau to assist in negotiating the marriage of his wife's lover with a daughter of a neighbour of his sister, Madame de Cabris. Some difficulty arose, which Mirabeau imagined his personal intervention would remove. Regardless of the royal order confining him to Manosque, he hurried to the country house of the father of the young lady; and, returning, visited his sister at Grasse. Madame de Cabris, young, beautiful, witty, and unprincipled, the absolute mistress of an imbecile husband, was certain to afford abundant and welcome material for the scandal which enlivened the dulness of an idle and narrow provincial circle. One morning the citizens of Grasse were startled to find their walls and doors placarded with doggerel verses defaming the persons and morals of the ladies of the place. Since Madame de Cabris, whose notorious gallantries made her the most obvious mark for such ribaldry, was spared, there was little difficulty in guessing from what quarter the libel proceeded. Hence general indignation, of which a certain Baron of Villeneuve-Mouans made himself the mouthpiece in uncomplimentary criticism of Madame de Cabris and her family.

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While staying with his sister, Mirabeau, on an excursion into the country, saw M. de Mouans, who, white umbrella in hand, was watching his workpeople. He rushed upon him, tore from him the sunshade, and broke it on his back. The combatants closed and fell over one of the little stone terraces usual in Provence. They rolled struggling and kicking upon the ground, while Madame de Cabris and a friend—the sister-in-law, indeed, of the unhappy Mouans—leant convulsed with laughter against a wall.

To be beaten, and to seek reparation in a law-court, as M. de Mouans thought fit to do, was in those days hardly consistent with the character of a gentleman; to charge Mirabeau with an attempt at premeditated murder, when he had no weapon but the umbrella of his victim, was absurd; but it was scarcely less absurd for the aggressor to plume himself on this ignoble scuffle with a fat and wheezy middle-aged man as a chivalrous and heroic vindication of his sister's character—the sister of whom he afterwards said that to be a wanton was her most venial vice.

After this proof that the order confining his son to Manosque was no security against further escapades, the Marquis obtained a *lettre de cachet* committing him to the custody of the governor of the Château d'If, a fort on an island off Marseilles, best known probably to the reader as the prison of a more innocent victim—Edmond Dantès, Count of Montecristo. He hoped also that this show of parental rigour might induce M. de Mouans to drop a criminal prosecution begun at Grasse. Yet it neither was nor was meant to be wholly an act of kindness, as some biographers have

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imagined—it was in part a punishment, for the Marquis asked that his son should be placed under severe discipline and treated as a criminal.

Mirabeau, as usual, fascinated his gaoler, who declared that his prisoner had never given him or any one else the smallest ground of complaint, and that when he left he would carry with him the friendship and respect of every one in the place. Moved partly by this, partly by the intercession of his brother the Bailli, the Marquis of Mirabeau asked that his son might be removed to less rigorous captivity in the hill fort of Joux, near Pontarlier.

Although the Friend of Humanity was neither such a tyrant nor so avaricious as was generally believed on the evidence of his domestic enemies, yet we cannot acquit him of all responsibility for his son's faults and misfortunes. "Believe me," Mirabeau wrote to his father, "there are men who need employment, and I am one of the number." He had done well when on active service in Corsica, and not amiss when fully occupied in his father's affairs. Leisure in which such a busy brain, such fiery passions must find work for themselves, could not but be fatal to him. The Marquis still had influential friends at home, and powerful admirers and disciples abroad. If in time of peace he could not obtain employment for his son in the French army, he might surely have found a sphere for his energies abroad. The king of Sweden was eager to do honour to the Friend of Humanity, and Gustavus III., a demagogue as able and ambitious as ever wore a crown, might have found the future tribune of the French people a useful instrument.

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Mirabeau was condemned to the idle life of a prisoner in a dreary fort perched on a mountain, above a dull little frontier town, where, so he afterwards insisted, he was subject to the caprice of a harsh and tyrannical gaoler. In reality M. de Saint-Mauris, the governor of Joux, seems to have been as indulgent to his prisoner as the commandant of the Castle of If. The treatment Mirabeau received throughout his various imprisonments is a proof that the kindly sensibility of the latter part of the eighteenth century had penetrated to the most unlikely places—to the offices of the police and to the gaols. Not only was he permitted to go and come as he pleased during the day, M. de Saint-Mauris allowed him to take a trip across the frontier into Switzerland, and endeavoured to procure for him whatever relaxation the neighbourhood afforded, whether of sport or society.

He nowhere found a warmer welcome, nor one more to his taste, than in the house of the most important inhabitant of Pontarlier, the Marquis of Monnier, late president of the Chambre des Comptes of Dôle. The traditional romance of Mirabeau and Sophie de Monnier, the creation of the inventive genius of the orator and of the wish of his earlier biographers to gratify the sentimental taste of their public, a romance half accepted by the natural piety of the "Adopted Son," represents the president as a harsh, avaricious, atrabilious old man, the jealous and unsympathetic husband of a lovely, accomplished, and artless girl. All this, except the age of M. de Monnier, appears to be pure fiction.

The ex-president received the prisoner most kindly. Mirabeau himself says: "He listened with pleasure to

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the story of my misfortunes, and even of my faults, and was prodigal of encouragement and advice." So far from being jealous, he welcomed the visits of his young friend, who does not hesitate to give the most odious explanation of the blindness of M. de Monnier to an intrigue which had begun to be notorious. Sophie's confession, "I grossly abused my husband's confidence," disproves the insinuation, which, moreover, is quite inconsistent with her equally baseless complaints of his jealousy.

Sophie herself, of whom Mirabeau wrote that directly he saw her his heart was irresistibly and permanently enslaved—"ut vidi, ut perii"—that she attracted not by the allurements of the senses, not even by her gentle grace, her maidenly timidity, her sweet sensibility, but by her soul fashioned by nature in a moment of prodigal beneficence, this Sophie appears to have been a very ordinary young woman. A buxom Burgundian with irregular features, pleasant eyes, and a bright complexion, comely enough at twenty but likely, as she herself said, to be plain at forty. She had awkward manners and little education, though her father, the President de Ruffey, was a friend and correspondent of Voltaire and Buffon. Before she made the acquaintance of Mirabeau, a flirtation with an officer, to whom she had both written compromising letters and given money, had been the talk of the neighbourhood.

We cannot follow the tragi-comedy of the loves of Sophie and Gabriel in detail, however amusingly and instructively characteristic of morals and manners under the decadent monarchy, and of an administration arbitrary in form and careless of legality, but in

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practice well meaning, irresolute, and full of sentimental weakness.

Sophie declared her honour so outraged by some tardy suspicions and precautions on the part of her husband that she returned to her father's house at Dijon. Her lover followed and had the audacity to pursue her to a ball given by the Grand Provost—the head of the police of the province—M. de Monthérot. He caused himself to be announced by the burlesque title of the Marquis of Lancefoudras. Urged on by the parents of Madame de Monnier, the Grand Provost had no choice but to order the arrest of the escaped prisoner. Yet he did so reluctantly. A prison, said this official, a man of sentiment, was no place for the son of the Friend of Humanity, and he wrote strongly in his favour to Malesherbes, then Secretary of State. "Fair Helen caused the conflagration of Troy. Another Helen, for anything that is passable is beautiful here, has been the cause of this fire, which unless quenched, may cause endless mischief. . . . To send M. de Mirabeau back to Pontarlier would imperil the repose of a respectable family, the safety of M. de Saint-Mauris, who is useful to the State, and of M. de Mirabeau himself, an opening bud not the less promising because not without thorns."

Mirabeau, while at Joux, had invited his wife to accompany him in his flight to some foreign country, where he might find a career open to his talents. If she were with him he knew that he would not be left to starve. She had coldly refused, but now Madame de Monnier was willing, even eager, to be his companion, and could provide resources for herself and her lover until he obtained some employment. She was again at

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Pontarlier, had easily imposed on the doting credulity of her husband, and had been able to supply her lover with the means to fly from Dijon. After which, escaping in male attire, and carrying off all the money and jewels on which she could lay her hands—it was but fair, she said, she should resume her dowry now that she was joining the husband of her choice—she met Mirabeau at the nearest place across the Swiss frontier.

Society in France during the last century was tolerant in the extreme of the liaisons, however notorious, of married women, but an elopement was a scandal in the eyes of the world, as well as a serious offence against the law. The fugitives therefore, under the name of M. and Madame de Saint-Mathieu, sought refuge in Amsterdam, a large city, much frequented by strangers, where they might hope to escape notice. For the police of one country would not unfrequently conduct refugees from another back to the frontier over which they had escaped; or even allow them to be arrested where they were living.

During the seven months (September 1776—May 1777) which the pair spent in Holland, he was not always "the most perfect lover," nor she "the kindest and most tender of mistresses," but hard work, privations cheerfully borne, and such innocent recreation as was afforded by a common taste for music, raised their life above the low level of the previous intrigue. When Sophie's money was spent Mirabeau trusted to his pen for support. While still at Pontarlier he had, by the indulgence of M. de Saint-Mauris, visited Neufchâtel, and had entered into relations with a publisher there, who printed for him an anonymous *Essay on Despotism*

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This work attracted considerable attention. It deals in such generalities as were then likely to be popular, but the author's genuine aversion to despotism inspires more than one passage with a rhetoric which rings true and is not unworthy of the future orator. Mirabeau introduced himself as the author of this essay to the Dutch publishers, and gladly performed whatever task they would entrust to his hands. Nothing came amiss, whether reviews, paragraphs for the newspapers, translations from the English, or more original work, such as a pamphlet *Avis aux Hessois* denouncing the traffic carried on by German princes in the flesh of their subjects. In his *Essay on Despotism* he had called the king the paid servant of his people; he now reminded the Germans that princes exist only for the good of their people.

Mirabeau might have continued to live unmolested in Holland had his father not found that he could be as troublesome there as if at large in France. The suit of the Marchioness of Mirabeau for a judicial separation, which would deprive her husband of the control of her property, was about to be heard. Her son protested that he would give two years of his life to be with her and to be able to assist her lawyers with his advice and knowledge of domestic details. But, since this might not be, he would do what he could. He accordingly composed a pamphlet entitled *Anecdote à ajouter au nombreux Recueils des Hippocrisies Philosophiques* (sic), more annoying probably to the Marquis from the ridicule which it poured on the economists and their leader, who was described as an ignorant pedant aspiring to instruct princes and to reform agriculture, although he

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did not know the difference between wheat and rye, than from the attack upon him personally as the worst of husbands and the most tyrannical of fathers. Five hundred and fifty copies of this precious production were sent by the author to his mother for circulation in France, and with them six hundred copies of a *Mémoire* in which not only her husband but also the du Saillants and—bitterest of all to the Marquis—Madame de Pailly were slandered with utmost virulence. The bale was dispatched to the Marchioness under cover addressed to Sartines, the head of the police, who, less her friend than she supposed, sent copies to her husband and confiscated the rest.

Could the Marquis under such provocation abide by his determination to trouble himself no more about "the pestilent madman"? Must he not defend his reputation, the honour of his family against such foul attacks? He accordingly, in concert with the family of Madame de Monnier, procured through the French Embassy at The Hague the arrest and extradition of the fugitive couple.

The loves of Gabriel and Sophie ended (May 1777) with imprisonment, for him during forty-two months in the keep of the Castle of Vincennes, for her, until the birth of her child, in a sort of private house of correction in Paris, and afterwards in a convent at Gien. Before Mirabeau was brought to Vincennes the criminal judge of the Bailliage of Pontarlier, at the suit of M. de Monnier, had condemned him in default to be decapitated for the abduction of Madame de Monnier, while she herself had been sentenced to imprisonment for life.

Mirabeau's confinement was at first severe. His cell was but ten feet square, without a fireplace; he had

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neither paper nor books, saw no one, and was only allowed to walk for an hour daily in a little garden between the great keep and the lofty walls of the Castle of Vincennes. But no sooner had he been able to speak with the authorities than he won their favour. It was the old story, his gaolers and the police became his warmest partisans. They granted to him whatever indulgences could make solitary confinement more endurable; but however well he was treated, solitary confinement could not be other than torture to a being of such intense vitality, restless energy, and feverish passions. He was allowed to look at the outside world from the battlements of his prison, and to spend as much time as he pleased in the garden, where, when the doctors declared that it was necessary to his health, he also took horse exercise. But it was his marvellous power of work, his incessant intellectual activity, which enabled him to exist during those four years. He can scarcely have spent an unoccupied moment, so extensive was his reading, so innumerable the pages of his writing: one or two long letters daily, piles of commonplace books and translations, besides original compositions of the most various description. He was supplied with periodicals and journals as well as with books, and he appears to have read pen in hand, amassing a vast store of extracts, which he afterwards used without scruple, appropriating without acknowledgment whatever seemed serviceable.

The compulsory study and meditation of these years were not wasted. He came out of prison with a mind matured, if not sobered, by reflection, and enriched by omnivorous reading. He complained that his health

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had been ruined—his letters from Vincennes constantly tell of hæmorrhage, "nephritic colics," racking pains sufficient to melt the stoniest heart. His eyes certainly suffered from constant study and defective light. But his father, who saw him soon after his release, said that he looked well, somewhat thinner, and grown. For it is a remarkable fact, a proof perhaps of his abnormal vigour, that Mirabeau, though twenty-eight at the beginning of his imprisonment, was two or three inches taller when it ended. Had he been free, it is not uncharitable to suppose that his constitution would have been more impaired by the excesses and adventures of a libertine and restless life.

All to whom the name of Mirabeau is known have probably heard of the collection of his letters written during his imprisonment at Vincennes, published in 1792 by one Manuel, procureur-syndic of the municipality of Paris. Manuel asserted that the letters had partly come into his possession after the sack of the Bastille, where all documents relating to the prisoners there and at Vincennes were preserved, and had partly been entrusted to him by friends of the orator. Soon after his imprisonment Mirabeau was able to correspond with Sophie through the police agent, Brugnières, who had effected their arrest. The captor had been captivated by his prisoner on the journey from Holland, and took advantage of his official position to visit him, and to do what he could to serve him. Before long Mirabeau contrived to obtain the much more valuable favour of le Noir, the lieutenant of police, no friend to the economists, for he had been dismissed by Turgot, and had only recovered his office after the

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fall of that minister. He was therefore well disposed to one who represented himself as hated by his father not so much for the venial errors of youth, as for lapses from physiocratic orthodoxy.

Sophie's confinement was expected; it was impossible for the sensibility of le Noir to refuse to the unhappy lovers such comfort as they might derive from letters necessarily innocent, since they must pass through his office. There is a difference between the earlier letters in Manuel's series, those conveyed by Brugnières, and the later, a difference which we should expect, since the latter were read by the police, and had to be returned to them by the recipients. It is now also known that there was another, a secret correspondence, not less voluminous, probably carried on by the help of the turnkeys of the prison, whom Mirabeau had found means to bribe. A great number of the letters which passed secretly between the lovers came into the hands of M. de Montigny, and many of them were destroyed by him out of tenderness to the memory of Mirabeau. The heir of the "adopted son" entrusted those which had been kept, together with other documents relating to the orator, to M. de Loménie. From what the latter tells us it appears inexplicable, in the first place, why these letters were not destroyed as soon as read, and in the second that the piety of the adopted son should have spared any from the flames. If he kept the least discreditable, what must those have been which he burnt?

The existence of this secret correspondence, which began in the spring of 1778, and during the first year of which the lovers exchanged some 370 letters, shows

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that those in Manuel's collection, written subsequently to the earlier part of that year, were not so much intended for Sophie, as for the edification of the authorities, to secure their sympathy, to put the past conduct of the writer in the most favourable light, to throw the blame of whatever he had done amiss upon others, and to excite compassion by the description of his bodily and mental sufferings. He would insert just so much of the raptures of a lover, so much of what was intimate and personal, as might prevent the police from supposing that he had any other means of communication; and it is amazing how little reticence he apparently judged to be natural in letters which were to be read by a third person and preserved in the public archives.

The four volumes published by Manuel are the best known of Mirabeau's works, and on the whole they enable us to form a better conception of the writer than anything else from his pen that has been printed. The student of his life cannot but ask what was the secret of the charm which this man exercised over those who came in contact with him? We are indeed told that the glance of his penetrating and often insolently defiant eyes could be singularly caressing, that a winning smile changed the whole expression of the rough-hewn face. There is something, no doubt, more flattering and convincing in the endearments of a lion who could rend us than of a lapdog, and Mirabeau must at all times have appeared the embodiment of suppressed energy and power. When reading the letters from Vincennes, we in some degree feel as if in his actual presence. In them, notwithstanding much mawkish and second-hand senti-

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mentality, much that is insincere and artificial, notwithstanding rhapsodies that ring false and purple patches stolen here and there, we can recognise the geniality, the elasticity of spirits, the wide intellectual interests and sympathies, the clear insight and absence of bitterness, that must have made the society of such a man, gifted as few have been with the power of oral expression, singularly fascinating. What else he wrote during his captivity need not detain us. The titles bear witness to the variety of his studies, but there is less in the voluminous collection to raise than to degrade his reputation.

After Mirabeau had been a year and a half in prison he lost the only child of his marriage, a boy of promise —a blow more felt by the grandfather and grand-uncle, whose hopes for the future of their house it shattered, than by the mother, who was living a gay life of balls, concerts, and theatricals, in the society of her father and his elegantly dissipated friends. The idea of releasing the prisoner and effecting a reconciliation between him and his wife occurred to the Bailli, and was by him cautiously suggested to his brother. The Marquis affected to be deaf to such hints. Six months later he wrote to his friend, Le Franc de Pompignan, —Voltaire's rhyming butt—as if nothing was farther from his thoughts than to release "a monster loaded with public and private crimes, and with all the ignominy of his debts, rascalities, and frauds, notoriously guilty of having libelled his father by paragraphs in all the public prints of Europe, and in pamphlets published for no other purpose."

But while posing as the stern vindicator of public

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and private morals, he allowed a friend to hint to the prisoner that there was one mediator whose intervention might be efficacious—the Countess of Mirabeau. The Marquis was anxious to appear to yield only to the prayers of his daughter-in-law, both because concession to her would imply least inconsistency, and because by interceding for her husband she would to some extent commit herself to a reconciliation with him. So with rage in his heart Mirabeau set himself to compose letters to his hated wife, which in their way are works of art, breathing respectful tenderness, regret for the past, scarcely hinted hope for the future. At length Madame de Mirabeau coldly expressed a wish that such liberty might be given to the prisoner as would test the sincerity of his repentance. Mirabeau purchased freedom at the price of a double degradation. His father helped to destroy whatever sense of honour he retained by insisting that he should humiliate himself with hypocritical apologies to his wife, and should take a part against his mother, indecent in any case, but after what had passed between them doubly dishonourable.

Of the actors in this unpleasing scene in Mirabeau's life only one leaves the stage in a way to excite any sympathy. The love of Madame de Monnier was deep enough to be unselfish. She urged her lover to write to his wife, to be reconciled to her, if that was the necessary condition of his liberty. She even wrote to his father, taking upon herself the whole blame of their elopement. The tragic end of Sophie de Monnier may atone for much that was amiss. Once again she and her lover met for a few days. But only to find

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that his passion had expired—possibly it had long been dead—while amorous rhetoric and sentimental fancy were masquerading in its semblance. She went on living in her convent at Gien. Neither her past life nor new scandals prevented her from being well received by the society of the neighbourhood. She became engaged to a respectable gentleman, but he died before the wedding-day, and Sophie committed suicide (September 1789). The news of her death was abruptly told to Mirabeau by a colleague in the Assembly. He turned pale, mastered his emotion, and, leaving his place, was not again seen for several days.

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CHAPTER III

Mirabeau presents himself for trial—His suit against his wife—Madame de Nehra—Visit to England—Financial Pamphlets—Mission to Berlin.

MIRABEAU was at liberty and endeavoured to earn a complete pardon by zealously assisting his father in his lawsuit with the Marchioness. Just released from prison, convicted of abduction and adultery and sentenced to death by the court of Pontarlier, he not only interviewed official persons, but appeared in open court as his father's representative and browbeat the lawyers on the other side. He had even the assurance to ask Maurepas in the name of the Marquis for a *lettre de cachet* banishing a lover of his sister Madame de Cabris. "Your father," answered the Prime Minister, "mistakes me for his man of business. It is intolerable that there should be no end to the scandals in your family. The king will hear no more of them." Notwithstanding Mirabeau's efforts, his mother obtained her separation from her husband and the control of her property. The actions she subsequently brought against the Marquis for dilapidation and waste completed their common ruin. Law, cards, and the scoundrels into whose hands she fell reduced her to abject poverty.

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The Marquis released his son in the hope that he would be reconciled to his wife; but the Countess could hardly be asked to share the fortunes of a man under such a sentence as had been passed on the seducer of Madame de Monnier. That sentence was *in contumaciam*, that is to say it only took effect after the lapse of five years, provided that the accused had not previously "purged his contumacy," *i.e.* presented himself before the court; if he did so the case had to be heard afresh. Mirabeau accordingly surrendered himself at Pontarlier (February 1782) to stand his trial.

The local court was no match for the brazen effrontery, the ingenious quibbles, and ready tongue of the strange criminal who treated not the witnesses only, but the judges themselves as if he had been on the bench and they trembling in the dock before him. After the case had been transferred to the Parliament of Besançon, and Mirabeau had spent some three months in prison, it was finally agreed, thanks to the exertions of his brother-in-law du Saillant, assisted by the family of Madame de Monnier, that the proceedings against Mirabeau and Sophie should be dropped.

The "rehabilitation" was perhaps as complete as could have been expected under the circumstances, but great expense had been incurred. The old Marquis was very angry. Fearing, or affecting to fear, another *lettre de cachet*, Mirabeau once more crossed the frontier to Neufchâtel. He hoped to obtain a little money by the sale of some of the MSS. compiled at Vincennes. At Neufchâtel he made the acquaintance of several of the leaders of the liberal party at Geneva, who, after a successful attempt to overthrow the ruling oligarchy, had

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been driven into exile by French intervention. Two of these men were afterwards of the greatest service to him, important members of the workshop which turned out the innumerable pamphlets, newspaper articles, and speeches circulated with his trademark. Clavière, a banker, the deviser of *Assignats* and the future finance minister of 1792; Duroveray, a lawyer who subsequently drafted most of Mirabeau's Letters to his Constituents, and acted for some time as editor of his newspaper. Laying aside once more his resentment, the Marquis advised his son to visit Provence, and to open, with the help of his uncle, the campaign which was to restore to him his wife. His own fertility of resource would suggest a plan of operations, by which her reluctance and the opposition of those who were interested in keeping them apart might be overcome. Any means were fair to obtain so good an end. But publicity and the scandal of a lawsuit must be avoided.

The Bailli had bitterly resented the libels and insults published by his nephew against the head of the family. He wrote that he was surprised at the depth of the aversion he felt for the reprobate. But forewarned was not forearmed. With his eyes open the honest sailor once more fell under the charm (October 1782). Each successive letter he wrote after Mirabeau's arrival in Provence shows him to be more and more appeased. In the end he vaunts the poor fellow's amiability and docility, and is convinced that though his shortcomings have been many, he has more frequently been sinned against than sinning.

A demand for separation on the ground of cruelty, infidelity, and desertion was the answer of the Countess

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to a formal summons to return to her husband's roof. Mirabeau thought, and not without reason, that he could easily meet such charges. Passionate he perhaps had been, but the particulars of cruelty alleged were trumpery inventions, and he could produce letters subsequently written by his wife in terms of the tenderest affection. The charge of desertion was absurd in the mouth of a woman who had been deaf to her husband's entreaties that she should join him at If and Pontarlier. His adultery, indeed, had been notorious, but the law has ever been indulgent to the unfaithfulness of the husband. He applied to the "Lieutenant-General" of Aix and his assessors for a writ ordering his wife to take up her abode under her husband's roof, or, as was usual pending a suit for separation, in a convent.

The bar of Aix was exceptionally brilliant, but the advocates most in repute had been retained by Madame de Mirabeau. Her husband was not sorry to conduct his own case. He was full of confidence in himself, and determined to seize this opportunity of exciting popular sympathy and of proving that he was no ordinary man. He was successful in obtaining his writ from the court of first instance, although opposed by Portalis, not less distinguished as an advocate than afterwards as one of the principal compilers of the Civil Code. Mirabeau's speech, which was carefully written, is remarkable for tact, eloquence, and pathos, although it contains a characteristic instance of his audacious plagiarism, a passage copied verbatim from the most celebrated peroration of Bossuet. The audience was entirely carried away; it is said that M. de Marignane himself wept.

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But this was only a preliminary skirmish, and useless to Mirabeau except as a prognostic of victory. The Countess at once appealed to the Parliament against the decision of the lower court, and her advisers attempted to obliterate the favourable impression made on the public by publishing a violent *Mémoire*. In this they supported their charges true and false against Mirabeau by copious extracts from his father's correspondence with his daughter-in-law and M. de Marignane. He replied by a printed statement of his case not wanting in dignity and moderation.

His opponents were not a little perplexed and alarmed. Not the populace only, many of his own class who had hitherto avoided him began to express their sympathy. He must be spurred, said one of Madame de Mirabeau's counsel; when he feels the spur he will start like an unbroken colt and rush headlong into any pitfall. Portalis accordingly opened the case before the Parliament with a long and virulent invective in which the charges of the *Mémoire* were repeated and amplified. He attacked and calumniated the Marquis of Mirabeau not less savagely than his son. After Portalis had spoken the court adjourned for several days, during which Mirabeau prepared his reply. He had the assistance of his counsel Jaubert, and of a young lawyer of talent, afterwards his private secretary and devoted friend, Pellenc. The position of the parties, Madame de Mirabeau a leader of Provençal society, her husband's notoriety, the reputation of his father, the eloquence of his previous speech, curiosity as to how he would meet the furious onslaught of Portalis, the attraction of sensational and scandalous details, raised public expecta-

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tion to the highest pitch. The Provençal gentry were still in their town houses; and not a few foreigners were at Aix, enjoying the pleasant southern spring and gay society of the place; among them was the brother of the queen, the Archduke Ferdinand, Governor of the Milanese, and his wife. The strangers were scarcely less eager partisans than the natives. A young Englishman, Lord Peterborough, would have drawn his sword in the public walks on M. de Gallifet, the boon companion of the Marquis of Marignane, had not Mirabeau himself interfered. Mirabeau's speech more than fulfilled the highly-raised expectations of the crowded audience. It has been often said that he sacrificed his case to an oratorical triumph, to the desire of humiliating his opponents, of casting back on them some part of the shame under which they had hoped to overwhelm him, that, carried away by the fervour of his rhetoric, he forgot the moderation he had hitherto observed in speaking of his wife, and by publicly disclosing her dishonour made a future reconciliation impossible.

But it was not so. In the first place, nothing Mirabeau said was spoken in haste. He read a carefully prepared speech. In the next place, the alarm of the other side at his vigorous offensive tactics was so great that they now for the first time showed themselves prepared to accept a compromise. It was proposed that the Countess should retire for two years into a convent where her husband might visit her, on condition that he should at the next sitting of the court explain away the charge he had made against her. The letter she had written to her lover at her husband's dictation, which had been produced by him in court, admitted

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of interpretations more or less charitable. It was the repetition by Mirabeau of the accusation after he had undertaken to withdraw it, which made the friends of the Countess irreconcilable and finally determined the verdict of the Parliament. He might easily have said that the wish he had at all times expressed for his wife's company, the steps he was now taking to recover it, proved that, even if she had allowed her affections to stray, he had never believed that she had been otherwise unfaithful. Instead of this he apologised for her error in a vein of maudlin sentiment. "She who fell, yet repented and sinned no more, is not less worthy, nay, she is more worthy of respect than many a one who has never been tempted and never fallen"—and so forth.

Although unsuccessful in his suit, for the Parliament by a bare majority decided in his wife's favour, Mirabeau obtained an amount of popularity and notoriety which must have gone far to console him. His reputation as an orator was established. His victory over the most rising member of the most brilliant bar in France had been decisive. It is said that Portalis was carried fainting out of court, after listening in pale and trembling agitation to the withering and not unmerited rebuke with which Mirabeau replied to the indecent extravagance of the abuse lavished on his father as well as on himself.

Mirabeau determined to appeal from the decision of the Parliament of Aix to the Council of State. His father objected, dreading further expense and further disclosures discreditable to the family; and since his advice was disregarded, declared that henceforward he

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would have nothing to do with his unworthy son and his affairs.

We have seen that Mirabeau first interfered in the quarrel between his parents as his father's agent. His zeal had been so great as to provoke his mother to fire a pistol at his head. Then he had as warmly espoused the cause of his "loved and respected Mama" against "the hypocritical tyranny" of her husband. Next he had not been ashamed, as the representative of the Marquis, to assist in the public exposure of his mother's frailties. To change sides a third time must, it might seem, have been impossible for the most brazen effrontery. Yet on his return from Provence, Mirabeau not only declared himself once more the partisan of Madame de Mirabeau, but was also able to persuade her to allow him to retain the greater part of a loan of 21,000 livres raised on the estate, the life-interest in which she had recovered. He was thus, for the first time in his life and for the last, until he concluded his treaty with the court, in possession of a considerable sum of ready money. He wasted nothing by paying his debts, but took expensive lodgings, and began to live the life of a man of pleasure and fashion.

We must pass rapidly over the next six years, in order that some space may be left for those two during which the biography of Mirabeau is little else than the history of the French Revolution.

In 1783 his faculties were fully developed, his character formed, nor did his political principles alter between 1783 and 1789. The abolition of feudalism and of privilege, complete toleration, civil liberty and equality, limited monarchy with representative institu-

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tions, a fiscal system based on sound economic principles, allowing the greatest possible freedom to trade and manufactures, and a national system of secular education—such were in his view the just claims of the nation. These reforms he demands in his first political writings. These, he insists in his advice to the court during the last year of his life, were the benefits conferred by the Revolution on France, which she must never be asked to forego. But if his principles, his talents, and his character were the same in 1783 and 1789, his knowledge and experience were greatly extended during this period by travel and by intercourse with many remarkable public men, while he became generally known, and his reputation as a serious politician was established by his writings.

It has been said that had Mirabeau succeeded in regaining his wife, he would have secured the opportunity and the means of living such a life that the Revolution would have found him an influential and respectable member of society. But would he have profited by the opportunity? No income could have sufficed for the expense of a man who, as his father said, would squander in a week all the treasures of Our Lady of Loretto. Nor could the frivolous and indifferent Countess, the object of his contempt and aversion, have effected a reformation in his character and life vainly attempted by the affection of a far superior woman, whom he both loved and respected.

Mirabeau's corpulence, his scarred and bloated face, made him appear older than his age, thirty-six. His reputation was what it deserved to be. His fortunes were at their lowest ebb, and appeared little likely to

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improve. Henriette van Haren, the natural daughter of a Dutch gentleman, but French by education, a beautiful girl of nineteen, who was living a quiet and blameless life on a small annuity left to her by her father, determined to sacrifice everything in order that she might give a man so out of favour with fortune the happiness which, he declared, and she believed, he could find only in her society. Sensible and sober, of a serene and placid disposition, she might not unreasonably think herself the companion most likely to save him from future errors; and the hope of rescuing an amiable profligate by the influence of their affection has at all times been a snare to some of the best of her sex. "I sacrificed," she says, "my quiet life to share the storms of his adventurous existence. I vowed to live for him alone, to follow him everywhere, to brave all if I could be of use to him in good fortune or in bad. I leave the friends of Mirabeau to judge whether I faithfully fulfilled the task I deliberately undertook." Nor was this solicitude for her lover's welfare merely a sentimental commonplace or an excuse to herself or others for the gratification of selfish passion. She assures us that she was never, in the ordinary sense of the term, in love with Mirabeau; and what we learn from other sources disposes us to believe that her affection was indeed calmer and more unselfish than that feeling to which the name of love is generally given.

Madame de Nehra, as she was called, had no relations, and had apparently the freedom from prejudice—so disregard of conventional morality was called—common at that time among the adepts of the popular

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"philosophy." Yet that such a girl, unblinded by passion, knowing to what chances she exposed herself, consented to become the mistress of such a man is another remarkable proof of that indescribable fascination of which we have so often seen the effect. "When I first saw him," she says, "I thought his appearance most unpleasing; I started back with repulsion. But, like many others, I not only by degrees became accustomed to his features, I even came to think them well suited to his genius. His countenance was expressive, his mouth charming, his smile very attractive."

All who saw her, men like Dumont and Romilly, or the respectable Lord Minto, little likely to be impressed by meretricious graces, spoke of Henriette de Nehra with admiration and respect. The old Marquis, at a time when he was most embittered against his son, wrote to his brother that all who had seen her agreed that she was charming and pitied her innocent simplicity. Mirabeau's letters to her, very unlike those he addressed to Sophie, are such as might have been written to an honoured wife. "Dear love," he says, "I have only had one really happy day in my life, that on which I learnt to know you, that on which you gave me your friendship . . . no happiness is possible away from you. Every feeling, from the most trivial impression to the loftiest thought, which I do not share with you, is worthless . . . your absence deprives me of what is best in me. Were you to abandon me I might seek forgetfulness in dissipation, not to find pleasure but death." For five years Henriette was his good genius. Although she was faithful to Mirabeau in thought and deed, both while she lived with him and afterwards till her death,

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her easy principles and the absence of passion and vanity in her affection prevented her from deeply resenting his numerous infidelities, so long as she possessed his confidence and unshaken friendship.

The only result of the appeal to the Council of State had been a quarrel with the Keeper of the Seals, Miromênil, whom Mirabeau attacked so violently in a pamphlet, that he thought it prudent to avoid the expected *lettre de cachet* by a visit to England. No sooner had he reached London than he wrote to Sir Gilbert Elliot, who was willing, so far as he was able, to serve him. Duroveray and others of the Swiss refugees, whose acquaintance he had made at Neufchâtel, introduced him to Burke and to Samuel Romilly, and through the latter he became known to Lord Lansdowne. He also visited Burke at Beaconsfield.

Mirabeau admired little in England except the independent spirit of the people. A riot in London was, he said, a pleasant contrast to the servility of Paris. In many respects he thought the British constitution defective, and the administration abominably corrupt. It was, in his eyes, a marvellous proof of the benefits of civil liberty that this alone had raised a people so little favoured by nature above the inhabitants of other countries. He was repeatedly present at debates in the House of Commons, where he must have learnt a great deal that was of use to him when a member of the National Assembly.

His means did not allow him to see much of English society. Sir Gilbert Elliot took him down to Bath, where his family was staying, and describes how Mirabeau frightened his sister-in-law by his vehement

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and, as he imagined, irresistible attentions; engrossed his host from morning to night; wore out Lady Elliot's patience by his self-satisfied loquacity; terrified her little boy by his caresses; and in short made himself so unendurable in a fortnight, that she insisted that if he visited Minto he must lodge with the gamekeeper. The truest friend he made in England, Romilly, says that his vanity was excessive; that he was violent and impetuous, dictatorial and intolerant in society. Indignant at a paradoxical defence of the severity of the English criminal law attempted over the dinner-table by Wilkes, he determined to crush him by his eloquence. He poured forth a vehement declamation in which, so he himself boasts with all his strange absence of humorous self-appreciation, he spoke of the profound immorality of the English demagogue. We can imagine the squint and leer of his cool and self-possessed opponent. At the table of Lord Lansdowne, so he relates in a letter written to Romilly,[1] who was on circuit, he met Gibbon, who spoke with ignorant assurance about continental politics. "I contented myself," he writes, "when Lord Lansdowne insisted that I should give my opinion, by answering in these few words"—and then follows a harangue of three pages, in which, as he flatters himself, he summarily disposed of Mr. Gibbon and his "elegant but not valuable" history. The remarkable fact about this meeting is that at the time (March 1785) the author of the *Decline and Fall* was most certainly at Lausanne. The elucidation of the mystery must be left to the ingenuity of the reader.

[1] *Memoirs of Sir S. Romilly*, vol. i. p. 311. Cf. the miscellaneous works of E. Gibbon, etc., vol. ii. p. 374, ed. of 1814.

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Romilly was attracted by the instructive and entertaining conversation of his new acquaintance; he was convinced that "his ambition was of the noblest kind, and that he proposed to himself the noblest end, but that he was unscrupulous about means." To the last Romilly remained his friend, and persisted in his charitable judgment of a man whose defects, which he allowed were great, must have been of a kind repugnant to his refined and almost puritanical nature. But Mirabeau had, he insisted, many very good qualities as well as great talents, was capable of very warm friendship, and often exerted the greatest zeal and made considerable sacrifices to serve his friends. He emphatically asserts his conviction that in public affairs he never suffered himself to be bribed to do that which his own heart and judgment condemned.

While in London Mirabeau translated and printed as his own a pamphlet by Romilly's friend, Benjamin Vaughan, on the opening of the Scheldt, and also a work entitled *Considerations on the Order of Cincinnatus*, which consisted of an essay he had written some time before with the assistance of Chamfort, together with remarks by Dr. Price, a letter of Washington, another of Turgot, and other second-hand matter. It must be owned that, as Dumont says, if each of his assistants had claimed the part they had contributed to his works, little would have been left; but it is fair to add that that little is just what gives life to the whole. Here and there a brilliant touch, a luminous thought, an original expression, an apostrophe full of fire and eloquence.

Mirabeau possessed the remarkable gift of discovering

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obscure men of talent, of giving to all the kind of encouragement they needed, of inspiring them with his own fervour, of making them eager in the accomplishment of some work of which he was to have all the credit. As Romilly says, he was a great plagiarist, but from avarice, not from poverty: whatever he found forcible or beautiful he considered a kind of common property.

Mirabeau felt himself out of his element in England, where it was clear that there was no career open to him. Madame de Nehra accordingly went to Paris to discover whether he could safely return to France. She obtained an interview with M. de Breteuil, and an assurance that her friend had nothing to fear. She hoped to persuade Mirabeau to live cheaply in some quiet place, where he might devote himself to the production of some serious and important work which should establish his reputation as an author and a publicist. But he found employment in Paris which was more to his taste than dull and studious days in some half-ruinous manor-house.

His acquaintance with the Swiss liberals stood him in good stead. Several of these, of whom Clavière and Panchaud are the best known, had settled in Paris and were distinguished in the stock-jobbing world by their acuteness, perhaps also by their comparative probity. Panchaud, a successful banker, was reputed to be the most skilful operator on the Stock Exchange, and deeply versed in all the mysteries of finance. His hospitable house was open to all men of quality whose need, or ambition attracted them to a method of gambling in which private information, obtained at the very centre

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of the financial and political world, appeared to offer a sure means of correcting the fickleness of fortune. Clavière introduced Mirabeau to Panchaud, and at the banker's table he frequently met Talleyrand, and Lauzun, then a fashionable roué and the boon companion of the Duke of Chartres.

In spite of all misgovernment under Lewis XV., the mere cessation of war had enabled capital to increase during the last years of his reign, and wealth had grown with even greater rapidity after the accession of his grandson. The number of joint-stock companies which came into existence are a proof that the people were saving and investing. The rise of a rich middle class, who resented the privileges and the insolence of men inferior to them in wealth, and not superior in education and culture, was among the causes of the Revolution. The growth of capital enabled ministers whose credit was far inferior to that of Necker to float their loans, and encouraged them to plunge into a deeper gulf of insolvency.

The most important joint-stock concern was the *Caisse d'Escompte*, of which Panchaud had been one of the chief founders under the auspices of Turgot in 1776. This establishment, besides doing the business suggested by its name, was a bank of deposit and issue. It was closely connected with the Bank of St. Charles, a State bank founded in 1782 by Cabarrus in Spain, the shares of which were for the most part held in Paris, and were, like those of the *Caisse d'Escompte*, at a high premium. Calonne was not over pleased with the popularity of these companies. Their shares were more tempting to investors than the public funds, and he

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thought that the value of the national securities was thus depressed, and the difficulty of getting new loans taken up increased. Panchaud had quarrelled with the *Caisse d'Escompte*, and for other reasons, speculative and private, both he and Clavière were anxious to see a fall in its shares, and in those of the Bank of St. Charles. Mirabeau was glad of an opportunity to advertise himself as a man skilled in finance at a time when politics and finance were almost synonyms. How to meet the growing deficit was the Sphinx's riddle which each successive minister must solve or perish. He therefore readily allowed his stock-jobbing friends to put him in the forefront of the battle. Between May and December 1785 he published five pamphlets—two of them fair-sized books—attacking in succession the *Caisse d'Escompte*, the Bank of St. Charles, and the Water-works of Paris Company. It needed, he said, nothing but industry and a knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and of the conjugation of the verb *avoir*, to qualify a man as an authority in financial subjects. But he took care to secure the help of those who possessed more special knowledge. Clavière, according to Brissot, a rich mine of uncut diamonds, supplied him on this, as on many subsequent occasions, with the greater part of his facts and arguments. Mirabeau was just the man to give brilliancy to the rough diamonds of his friend by his cutting, and to set them to the best advantage. The book on the *Caisse d'Escompte* was solid and sensible, attracted considerable attention, and raised the author's reputation. The next production published under his name, criticising the Bank of St. Charles, was written by desire of the Comptroller-General. Mirabeau

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characteristically persuaded Clavière and Brissot, the future Girondist, then living the precarious life of a wandering journalist, to hand over to him the MS. of a work they had written on the subject. He altered a few details, breathed life into the whole, and astonished Calonne by producing in eight days a book of over 300 pages. The shares of the Bank of St. Charles began to fall; they had reached 800 livres, they stood before long at 320. The minister for many reasons did not wish that it should be known that he had instigated this attack on the bank. A decree of the Council of State suppressed the pamphlet as "written by one of those individuals who have the audacity to discuss matters of importance, although too ignorant to do so with any profit to the public." Mirabeau thought himself shabbily treated, but concealed his anger in the hope of some lucrative public employment. In the meantime he kept his name before the public by an onslaught on the Water-works Company. After the publication of Mirabeau's tract the shares of the Water-works fell nearly 44 per cent. This, following on the rapid depreciation of the shares of the *Caisse d'Escompte*, and of the Bank of St. Charles, produced a panic on the Stock Exchange. Instead of the depreciation of other securities causing the public funds to rise, they fell in sympathy with the market. Calonne, himself a shareholder, by the king's generosity, in the Water-works, was easily persuaded that he had made a mistake in encouraging the bears. He was very angry with Mirabeau, who thought it prudent to follow the advice of Talleyrand and to visit Berlin. He had for some time meditated a book on the Prussian Monarchy, and

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he naturally wished to see the founder of that remarkable state, the most striking figure in the history of the eighteenth century. But if the journey to Berlin was a retreat, it was a retreat with beating drums and colours flying.

Beaumarchais, even more prominent as stock-jobber and promoter than as wit and playwright, had taken up the cudgels for the Water-works Company in a pamphlet containing a good deal of indifferent pleasantry and much personal abuse of Mirabeau, the "hireling of unscrupulous speculators." Beaumarchais can hardly have been conscious how much heavier metal was carried by the adversary he rashly challenged, how impenetrable the armour of his brazen assurance: at all events he was silenced by the first broadside poured into him. And yet it must have needed all Mirabeau's effrontery, all his useful want of humour, to enable him to assume the tone of a severe moralist offended by the licence of Beaumarchais' plays. He solemnly rebuked the author of *Figaro* for the want of decorum in his life, for the adventures by which he had risen to wealth and notoriety, for his intimacy with questionable characters. He repelled with virtuous indignation the monstrous charge that he was a venal hireling, he who only sought to atone for youthful errors by his zeal in the cause of truth, and by defending the interests of the poor against monopolising capitalists. After crushing Beaumarchais, he intended to show Calonne that he was not a man to be taken up and dropped with impunity. He composed a letter to him, a book in volume. He declared in the tone of something more than an equal that the time was come when he had no alternative but

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to summon the minister before the bar of public opinion, and to call upon the nation to judge between them.

Talleyrand, Lauzun, and other friends persuaded Mirabeau not to publish this invective, while they convinced Calonne that it was better that a man capable of writing it should be his ally than his enemy.

Mirabeau meantime with his "horde," as he called it —Madame de Nehra, the adopted son, servants, and secretary—had arrived at Berlin. The king, who had noticed his name among the list of strangers, granted him an audience. Frederick expressed a hope that they might frequently meet, but politely ignored the hint of his visitor that, had his previous life made him worthy of such a privilege, it would have been his highest ambition to serve so great a prince.

Mirabeau spent several months at Berlin, seeing every one who was worth seeing, or from whom anything could be learnt, using to the utmost his marvellous faculty of assimilating the ideas and information of others, storing his capacious memory and voluminous note-books with whatever might be of use at some future time. He improved his knowledge of the international politics of Europe by frequent conversations with Ewart, the Secretary of the British Legation, and with Dohm, an accomplished official of the Prussian Foreign Office. In his spare moments he attacked the Illuminati in a pamphlet on Cagliostro and Lavater, or pleaded the cause of the Jews in a work on Moses Mendelssohn. Then he paid a hurried visit to Paris, ostensibly for the purpose of obtaining payment of the arrears of the allowance settled on him by his father at the time of his marriage, in reality to see Calonne, who had been

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persuaded by their common friends to entrust him with a secret mission in Berlin. It was obvious that a new reign was at hand, and a more clear-sighted observer than the Count of Esterno, the French envoy at the Prussian Court, might be useful.

In the summer of 1786 he returned to Berlin. Vergennes, the minister of foreign affairs, objected to employing a man in whom he felt no confidence; and, though he yielded to Calonne, he attached no importance to Mirabeau's mission. He did not even read his letters. Sixty-six of these, some very lengthy, were written between July 1786 and January 1787. They were deciphered by Talleyrand, who omitted much that he thought indiscreet or likely to injure the writer. In 1788 Mirabeau said the four beings in the world dearest to him were Madame de Nehra, Talleyrand, Lauzun, and Panchaud. It is true that a year earlier he had lamented that he was still obliged to keep on terms with "a being so vile as Talleyrand, sordid, greedy, and designing, who delighted only in filth and gold, who had sold his honour and his friend, and would sell his soul if a purchaser could be found for such vile trash." But such diatribes, "Mirabelles" Beaumarchais called them, whether from the pen of Mirabeau or of his father, must not be taken too seriously. They often only express, in the style peculiar to the family, a passing mood of annoyance.

After Talleyrand had edited Mirabeau's dispatches they were submitted by Calonne to the king, who appears to have regarded them rather as amusing, though unedifying, light literature than as of any political importance. They are, indeed, much more

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like the composition of an unscrupulous "special correspondent" than of a serious diplomatist, letters which, written for a newspaper, would make the fortune of any editor bold enough to print them. Mirabeau never wrote anything else so clever, so amusing, and so original. Personal details, gossip, and scandal occupy as much space as matters of more serious political interest. Interviews with people of importance are reported, in which Mirabeau, by his own account, showed all the unconsciously impertinent self-sufficiency, the calm assumption of infallibility, which delight us in a well-known newspaper correspondent of our own day. In his more serious mood he describes with remarkable insight the symptoms and the causes of the dangers which threatened the state of Frederick the Great. He discerned the real weakness of Prussia, which was concealed by the glory of the late reign, and by the possession of an army of 190,000 men accustomed to victory. But this very weakness made it desirable that France should ally herself with Prussia rather than with Austria, and he advocates at the same time a good understanding with England, founded on the community of mercantile interests which would be the result of free-trade between the countries.

During the winter of 1786-87 Mirabeau's position at Berlin became more and more uncomfortable. The French envoy, Esterno, had done his best to enlighten the Germans as to the antecedents and the reputation of the interloper. But much was Mirabeau's own fault. Prince Henry had at first treated him with real kindness. But he soon found himself obliged to be on his guard against the pushing familiarity of his new acquaintance,

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who, bitterly offended by what he considered the prince's fickleness, revenged himself by describing the man whom he had pronounced to be "half hero half sage" as one of the most abject of the human race, defaming him, says Gibbon, "with the wit and malice of a demon." He offended the new king by a letter of over sixty pages, in which he instructed him in the tone of a heaven-sent teacher as to what he should do or leave undone. Much indeed of the counsel he gives is excellent. He could scarcely touch political subjects without feeling the inspiration of genius. Everywhere and at all times, here as in his advice to Lewis XVI., he is true to the fundamental articles of his creed, complete civil equality, toleration, freedom of the press, a uniform system of public education, free-trade. He, indeed, says nothing about representative institutions to the king of Prussia, but he warns the successor of Frederick II. and the contemporary of Joseph II. that he should make it his pride not to govern over much.

Mirabeau determined to leave Berlin. His debts were growing, and Calonne was deaf to complaints about the insufficiency of his pay, and to demands for more lucrative and honourable diplomatic employment. Above all he was anxious to be back in France. It needed not his prescience to know that stirring times were at hand—times when, as he hoped, it would be asked not what a man had been or had done, but what he was and what he was capable of doing.

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CHAPTER IV

Mirabeau attacks Calonne and Necker—Publication of the *Monarchie Prussienne*—Negotiations with Montmorin—New reconciliation with his father—First meeting with La Marck—Publication of the Berlin letters—Candidature in Provence.

MIRABEAU claims to have first suggested to Calonne that he should summon the Notables, and he hoped to be one of the two secretaries of that assembly. When he found himself passed over, his indignation was great. To Talleyrand and other friends of Mirabeau Calonne said with careless indifference that a little money would put all right. "I will teach him," exclaimed Mirabeau, "that though I may be a useful tool to use I am a dangerous one to throw away."

He made good the threat by publishing a pamphlet which gave the minister ample reason to repent that he had slighted the claims of so sturdy a beggar. We have seen how Mirabeau had been employed to write down certain securities; more recently, fearing that a general panic might lead to a fatal collapse in the funds of his bankrupt Government, the minister had tried to sustain prices by purchasing with public money the shares of companies attacked by the bears—not perhaps, as was suspected, without hope of private profit. This unworthy jobbing was attacked by Mirabeau in a

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pamphlet now published, the *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage*, which is in form little else than a long harangue addressed to the Notables. The result was a tenth or, as Mirabeau preferred to call it, a seventeenth *lettre de cachet* confining the author to the Castle of Ham. The victim had ample warning and crossed the frontier. In a month he was able to return to Paris. Calonne, convinced that he was not less formidable as an enemy than useful as a friend, wrote a most amicable letter. This was a crisis when it behoved every good patriot to support a reforming Government, and "it would be unworthy of him to sacrifice the public good to any private resentment."

Necker was Calonne's most dangerous rival. In the *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage* Mirabeau had already pointed out the fatal results of the reckless borrowing practised by the popular financier. In a short pamphlet, published a month later (*Première Lettre sur l'administration de M. Necker*), he accused him of having overthrown by his intrigues the only minister (Turgot) capable of effecting the regeneration of the country, and of ignorance of the true principles of political economy and finance.

A second and more virulent attack (*Seconde Lettre sur l'administration de M. Necker*) was a return for the renewed civility of Calonne. The attempt of Necker to show that the deficit he had been accused of leaving his successors to deal with had been exaggerated was refuted, and the writer calls upon those "who still believe that it is possible to love their God, their country, and their king, without worshipping M. Necker," to judge whether appeals to his character and his virtues are a

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sufficient proof of the ex-minister's assertions; to say whether his boast that he could raise whatever money might be required by loan, without imposing fresh taxation, ought not to be his shame; whether this is not the way to intoxicate the rulers of a country, to persuade them that those warlike schemes of ruin and destruction which are the curse of mankind are easy of execution. "Credulous nation!" he concludes. "Hasten to admire him whom your children will curse!"

As a matter of fact, the prudish pedantry, the sentimental vanity, the carefully cultivated popularity of Necker were scarcely less likely to injure France than the want of principle and frivolity of Calonne, and they were infinitely more irritating to Mirabeau. There were two men to whom he had a natural antipathy, who exasperated him more than all others, whom he may almost be said to have hated, and who were insensible to the fascination he exercised over most of those with whom he came in contact, and unfortunately these men, Necker and Lafayette, were just those with whom it was most important in the interests of his own ambition and of France that he should have a good understanding. If Necker had yielded to his influence, the Revolution might have been averted; if Lafayette had accepted his proffered alliance, it would have run a different course. But both Lafayette and Necker were ostentatiously honourable men, vain and self-satisfied, jealous of their popularity, of very second-rate ability, and uneasily conscious and impatient of the superiority of the man whom they affected to despise.

During the first months of the ministry of Loménie

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de Brienne, Mirabeau was occupied with the work on the Prussian Monarchy, which was to establish his reputation as something more than a pamphleteer and political free-lance. In the summer of 1787 he again visited Germany to discuss the compilation with his collaborator, Major Mauvillon, a German officer of French extraction, who was teacher of tactics at the Military Academy of Brunswick. Mauvillon collected and arranged the statistics and other information, the accuracy of which gives some value to what is otherwise a very dull book. The purple patches added by Mirabeau here and there to the four folio volumes are neither numerous nor of conspicuous merit. The generalisations are vague or commonplace. Yet the book when published (July 1788) produced the effect at which the author aimed. "Society," says M. de Loménie, "in that age of amiable frivolity was very respectful to works which made a parade of gravity and erudition. Those who in their heart thought them dull and clumsy dared not say so, lest they should be considered unenlightened." Mirabeau's name as a politician was greatly raised by the publication of the *Monarchie Prussienne.*

Since their last rupture the Marquis had expressed the utmost contempt of his son's literary productions. He was a "stock-jobber's hireling," a "mad dog ready to be set at any one, and as eager to bite this man as that," "an incendiarist able to play no part but that of Samson's foxes," etc. He was a little better pleased by the attacks on Necker, the enemy of the economists and of free-trade. He could scarcely refuse to bless altogether the *Prussian Monarchy.* The delicate

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flattery of the dedication was balm to wounds inflicted by public neglect. "I have not dared," said the author addressing his father, "to ask your permission to publish this book under your auspices. I shrank from the pain I should have felt had it been withheld, and even then I could scarcely have refrained from dedicating it to you"; and he added that in proportion as he became a better citizen and a better man he more and more felt how great an honour it was to have such a father.

The contents of the book seemed to prove that these were not idle words: in it the old physiocrat recognised the fruits of his teaching. Some at least of the good seed thrown on to that teeming soil had struck root, and had forced its way through the rank growth of weeds. The Marquis lamented the writer's Voltairian attitude to religion, his hostility to the Catholic Church, but this was compensated by his economic orthodoxy. When Colbert was a god and Necker his prophet, it was a consolation to find sound doctrine vindicated by one who aspired to be a leader in the new France. It delighted him to read that "when the rulers of states are well instructed they will only strive to fulfil two functions, viz. to secure external peace by a good defensive system, and to preserve order at home by an exact, impartial, and inflexible administration of justice."

Pamphlets, letters, and newspaper articles continued to pour from Mirabeau's workshop. His name was ever before the public. On every subject he offered his advice. He propounded with undoubting assurance his nostrums, often borrowed without acknowledgment from his friends, for every ailment which afflicted the

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body politic. Such persistent self-advertisement, such emphatic dogmatism, and in justice we must also add so much common sense and insight, could not but raise the public estimate of the Count of Mirabeau. He became prominent among the reformers. He was one of the founders of the Constitutional Club, of which the few lawyers whose views were really liberal, as well as Lafayette, Condorcet, and Talleyrand, were members. He was active in the society for emancipating the negroes promoted by Brissot, which was also a centre of radical propaganda. Yet he let it be known that he was no irreconcilable enemy to the Government.

Vergennes, haughty and tenacious of old traditions, had been succeeded as minister of foreign affairs by Montmorin, whose timid mediocrity was more likely to be impressed by the plausible adventurer. "Consider, M. le Comte," Mirabeau wrote, "that the same talent which has been able, supported by public opinion, to hold its own against the Government, would, if employed by you, be still better able to assist the ministry. An active life is more to my taste than a speculative, and I should prefer to serve the Government by my acts, rather than to risk incurring your displeasure by my advice. In the king's service I am ready either to use or to venture my head . . . I place myself entirely at your disposal."

Montmorin received Mirabeau, listened to what he had to say, but gave him no office, diplomatic or other; he was too much the friend of Necker. The most he would do was to find the money for a paper which was to insinuate views favourable to the ministry. Mirabeau, who was one of the first fully to recognise the power of

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the press, never ceased to urge upon the Government the importance of using it to influence public opinion; but anonymous authorship was not to his taste, and only one or two numbers of the projected publication were published. The minister was probably glad to let the scheme drop when he found that the editor only meant to defend the measures of his employers when he approved of them; when he did not, he thought it much to abstain from criticism. Mirabeau had no love for the Parliament which had opposed all the reforms he had most at heart; but, since the almost incredible mismanagement of the Government had enabled the inveterate partisans of privilege to masquerade once more as the champions of liberty, he could with difficulty be induced to attack the lawyers—lest while tearing the mask off these hypocrites he should appear to be the apologist of arbitrary power. When at length he yielded to Montmorin's request, and published his *Réponse aux alarmes des bons Citoyens* (May 8, 1788), he contrived that it should be at once a defence of the Government, an attack on the Parliament, and a profession of his liberal faith. Privilege, he wrote, is doomed. The liberty of the individual must be secured, the press must be free, the representatives of the nation must meet periodically. The prince who did so much to secure American liberty must wish to be the king of freemen (Francs) and not of serfs.

On August 11, 1788, he wrote to Mauvillon: "You will see what a nation this will be on the day when it obtains a constitution, on the day when talent becomes a power in the State. On that day I trust you will also hear something of your friend." Yet he was not

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without prophetic forebodings, for a few days later he writes to another correspondent: "The states-general are inevitable, and the more so because we need them to re-establish our monarchical constitution. This lunatic of an archbishop would in his delirium lead us to anarchy and democracy. Unless we are careful these people will destroy the monarchy and hurl us into an abyss of misery. We shall now have the charlatan Necker, the king of the mob, in which alone there remains any energy, and which, if he has his way, will under his guidance end by destroying everything."

Mirabeau was a practical not a theoretical politician, and, although he had a clear and consistent conception of the reforms which were needed, he does not appear to have had any decided views as to the precise shape to be given to these reforms, still less as to what the constitution of the country should be. "Let us," he writes to a bookseller of Strasburg at a time when he had some thought of becoming a candidate for the representation of Alsace—"let us above all be on our guard against antiquarianism; let us disregard what has been, and consider only what ought to be, and let us not attempt too much." By this he does not mean that he would disregard the teaching of experience, and construct a constitution on *a priori* principles; he is alluding to the minute and trivial researches, then occupying so much attention, into forms of election and ceremonial observed at former meetings of the Estates. Certainly if the States-General were to serve any useful purpose it was necessary that their constitution should be determined, not by old precedents, but by the new requirements of the country. That the Government of

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France should be monarchical Mirabeau never doubted. Late in the autumn of 1788 he wrote to Lauzun, who had republican proclivities: "I shall be a zealous royalist, because I am profoundly convinced of the necessity of restoring the authority of the crown." He desired that which was afterwards the aim of the wisest and most moderate of the Constituent Assembly —an alliance of the king and people against the partisans of oppression and privilege.

Although unable to persuade the ministers to give him official employment, Mirabeau impressed them with the conviction that his services in the Estates might be useful, and disposed them to assist in securing his election. For the purposes of his candidature he needed, if not the active help, at least the countenance of his father. At the request of Montmorin the bishop of Blois, a connection of the family, tried to effect a reconciliation between the Marquis and his son. But the wish to discuss the *Monarchie Prussienne* with the author, and to instruct him on one or two points where he had gone astray, had more weight in determining the old Marquis to admit the offender to his presence than any ministerial mediation. "To my own surprise," he wrote to his brother, "I cannot help thinking that obstinate and unceasing labour may work even this miracle, and make an honest man of the count. . . . It is long since they have seen such a head in Provence, the husk which made it but wildly reverberating brass is broken. . . . I have myself discovered real genius in some things he has said and written. His untiring and indeed unequalled power of work, his imperturbable self-confidence and innate arrogance,

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united with a great deal of what is called *esprit*, have made him a person of importance in the world of finance, in the press, and more especially in modern politics. He proclaims openly that he will not suffer France to be demonarchised, and he is at the same time the friend of the leaders of the Third Estate"; and the old man goes on to vaunt the imposing effect on the crowd of his son's bold onslaughts on the Bank of St. Charles, on the stock-jobbers, on the Emperor, of his aristocratic manners, his respectful self-assertion with the great, agreeable pleasantry with women, of his ostentation, his splendid dress in a slovenly generation, his crowded ante-chamber, two and even three secretaries, of his masterful impetuosity on all occasions. Certainly, when he wrote in this strain, the Friend of Humanity was under the spell, and we smile, remembering Elliot's account of Mirabeau's dirty untidiness, or the Count of La Marck's description of his first meeting with his future friend, which took place in the summer of 1788, at a dinner given by the Prince of Poix, the governor of Versailles. Mirabeau was, says La Marck, tall, but at the same time stout and heavily built. His unusually large head was made to appear still larger by a mass of curled and powdered hair. His coat buttons were of some brightly coloured stone, and the buckles of his shoes enormous. His dress was an exaggeration of the fashion of the day, and in bad taste. In his eagerness to be polite he made absurdly low bows, and began the conversation with pretentious and rather vulgar compliments. His manners wanted the ease which is acquired by mixing in good society, and this awkwardness was most conspicuous when he

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addressed the ladies. It was only when the conversation turned on politics that the eloquence with which he poured forth a copious store of just and brilliant ideas fascinated his audience, and made them forget all superficial absurdities. Yet much that appeared absurd and exaggerated in the dress and manner of the future orator may have been well suited to the part he was about to play before the mob of Provence, the crowded benches and the noisy galleries of the Assembly. The refined and quiet elegance, the unimpassioned politeness and delicate irony which characterised the well-bred gentleman of that generation, were singularly unsuited to the stormy political life of a people intoxicated with newly won liberty and the unwonted excitement of public deliberation. Mirabeau's loud dress and emphatic manners, not less than his great bulk and marked features, were as much in place when his voice rose in deep and deliberate thunder above the clamour of a disorderly debate, as they appeared out of place at a Versailles supper-table.

Although the Marquis had been reconciled to his son, he refused to give him, by conveying to him one of his Provençal estates, an indisputable place among the nobility of that province, who claimed to admit to their body only the actual tenants of fiefs. Yet Mirabeau's position had never been better than when he left Paris for his electoral campaign. Old scandals had been in great measure forgotten. He had not only gathered round him a few friends whose talents and knowledge he could use as his own; he had also become influential among the men who, whether lawyers like Duport and Fréteau de St. Just, journalists like Brissot, or restless

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aristocrats like Talleyrand and Lauzun, were desirous of change from patriotism, or ambition, or love of intrigue.

The numerous pamphlets and tracts on every subject of public interest, published in his name and more or less written by him, contained nothing inconsistent with his loudly professed zeal for the public good, as at once the friend of progress and liberty and a loyal subject of the French Monarchy. He was prepared to advocate moderate and practical reforms with all the fire and vehemence, with all the contagious ardour which unhappily is most commonly shown in the pursuit of what is mischievous, or at best impracticable and Utopian. He had the enthusiastic moderation, the fervent common sense which is the most rare and precious quality of genius, and which is especially valuable to the political reformer. But at the very moment when it was most important that he should do nothing to revive the memory of old misdoings, he chose by an act of wilful and dishonourable folly to prove that they were apparently right who maintained that no trust could safely be placed in a man of such a character. The publication of his secret correspondence from Berlin with the French Government was more fatal than all his other errors in its effects on his future position in the Assembly. Towards the end of 1788, after his infidelities, his absurd and passionate jealousy, and his not less agitating fits of remorse had driven Madame de Nehra from him, and had thus removed the only check on his prodigality, his pecuniary embarrassments were more than ever pressing. The reigning favourite, a passionate and unscrupulous woman, the wife of his publisher Lejay, suggested that

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the necessary supplies might be obtained by the publication of the secret correspondence from Berlin. It is characteristic of Mirabeau's strange want of any sense of honour that he should have committed such an outrageous breach of confidence with a light heart. He had already reached Aix (January 1789) when he heard of the scandal excited in Paris by the publication. Montmorin and the Government were furious. It was believed by many that Mirabeau had been bribed by the queen to print these letters in the interest of her brother, as an obstacle to that good understanding with Prussia which their author had hitherto advocated. Others more charitably thought that his enemy Beaumarchais had obtained a copy of the correspondence, which he now published to blast Mirabeau's reputation before the meeting of the Estates. The Constitutional Club proposed to expel him, unless he could show that he was not personally responsible. Mirabeau took the matter very coolly. He protested that he could not understand all this outcry. It must be got up by the partisans of Necker, by hypocritical enemies who, under a show of righteous indignation, were seeking to satisfy a resentment of which they dared not avow the true motives. It was only after he had returned to Paris towards the end of February (1789) and found that he was about to be prosecuted before the Parliament, that he explicitly declared that he had never sanctioned the publication, and that the letters had been mutilated, interpolated, and envenomed (*empoisonnées*). Never, said Montmorin to the Prussian envoy, had the king and his council felt more anxious to end so odious a matter by a *lettre de cachet*, but at the present juncture the popular

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excitement made this impossible. There could, of course, be no longer any question of Mirabeau's candidature receiving the support of the Government. But though five years had elapsed since his lawsuit with his wife, his popularity and the fame of his eloquence survived in Provence, where he was received with open arms by the popular party. A speech he made on January 30, after the meeting of the Estates of the county, provoked the nobles to eject him from their body, on the ground that he was only next in the entail and not actual tenant of the fiefs of Mirabeau and Beaumont. Inspired by the celebrated pamphlet of Sieyès and full of appeals to first principles, this address, although calm and temperate in form, might well alarm the opponents of radical change. Perhaps one of the most lasting and far-reaching effects of the French Revolution was the substitution of the principle of the representation of the individual as such, of the social atom, for the principle of what may be called organic representation, the representation of the order, the class, the corporation, the group, in short of the social organ; and it is on the justice and necessity of this change that Mirabeau insists. No assembly, he maintains, is truly representative unless it represents every individual in the state. Every citizen must be either elector or elected. Therefore the provincial Estates, representing classes and corporations, cannot elect the members of a truly representative national assembly. Here again we are struck by the consistency of Mirabeau's political principles. No one was more alive than he to the liability of a popular assembly to be carried away by the influence of eloquence or by a burst of contagious

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emotion, no one had less faith in the instinctive wisdom and natural justice of the masses. Yet he opposed the creation of a second chamber, and wished to guard against the fallibility of an omnipotent popular legislature by the clumsier and less effectual device of a royal veto. He no doubt saw that if a second chamber is to be a sufficient obstacle to hasty and partial legislation it must be strong, and must represent those social forces which are not predominant in the other division of the legislature, in other words it must represent classes and interests, something more than the mere individual irrespective of his organic relation to society as member of an order, a profession, trade, or corporation. But to allow this is to violate the principle of individual representation.

Since his order would not listen to his advice, and sought to cast him forth from among them, he turned to the people, and as a candidate for their suffrages neglected nothing which might increase his popularity. He printed in his own name pamphlets and tracts, popular and liberal, but not without merit and moderation; and circulated anonymous puffs of his services and virtues. A "Citizen of Marseilles" instructs his townsmen what manner of man the Count of Mirabeau really is. "For fifteen years he has graven the principles of liberty and equality—the most sacred rights of man—in monumental works destined to outlive bronze and copper." "Provence was enslaved, the Count of Mirabeau appears and she is free. He is the most eloquent man of the age. Public assemblies are swayed by his voice, as the waves are hushed by the crash of the thunder. . . . His courage is even more

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astounding than his ability. No power on earth could make him belie a single one of his principles. His public life has been a series of struggles and triumphs in the cause of truth."

We have already noticed that long before the Revolution the peasantry of Provence had been very impatient of their feudal obligations. The report now spread that not only was it the king's will that these should be abolished, but also that the whole weight of taxation should be transferred to the shoulders of those who had hitherto escaped their fair share of the public burdens. The governor, the Count of Caraman, reported that "war had been declared against property and its owners . . . ," that "the populace insisted that henceforth they would pay nothing, neither dues nor taxes nor debts," but his sensibility shrank from vigorous measures. Something, however, had to be done when Marseilles fell into the hands of the mob. M. de Caraman, a descendant of Riquet the engineer of the canal of Languedoc, had in spite of some provocation kept on good terms with Mirabeau, partly in gratitude for being allowed to claim cousinship with the Riqueti, and he now appealed to him to exert his influence in the cause of law and order. The energetic candidate at once hurried to Marseilles. He harangued the mob, intimidated the disorderly with the aid of a volunteer corps composed chiefly of young men of the middle class, and in a masterly little tract demonstrated to the townspeople, who had insisted that their magistrates should fix a maximum price, that if as consumers they obtained bread at one-third less than the cost of production, it could only be at their own expense as tax-

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payers, since merchants would not continue to import nor bakers to bake at a loss, and that, as all their neighbours would hasten to buy in so cheap a market, they would be ruining themselves for the advantage of others.

Order had scarcely been restored at Marseilles when an urgent message from the governor summoned the self-constituted dictator to Aix. Here too a rabble, composed less of the work-people of the town than of all the vagabonds of the district, had attacked the town-hall, compelled the First Consul to fly for his life, stoned the philanthropic M. de Caraman, and plundered the private and public granaries. Mirabeau appeared, he was received, he said, like an idolised father, he organised and armed the decent citizens and quelled the rioters. A week later (April 4, 1789) he was returned at the head of the poll as one of the four deputies of the Commons of Aix. At Marseilles he barely secured his election. The rich and influential merchants looked upon him with suspicion, and his moderation had probably alienated the mob. He naturally chose to sit for the constituency which had shown the liveliest sense of his merits.

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CHAPTER V

The meeting of the States-General—Position of Mirabeau in the Assembly—The *Séance Royale*—Mirabeau at length is heard—Dismissal of Necker—Fall of the Bastille.

A MONTH after Mirabeau's election, on May 5, 1789, Lewis XVI. opened the Estates. It cannot be doubted that, had the Government placed before the States-General a comprehensive scheme of reforms satisfying the legitimate demands of the nation, the hopes of the crowd who had assembled to welcome the first day of a happier era might have been realised.

If in the vast and tedious address which Necker caused to be read there was no definite proposal of any kind, not only, as Mirabeau said, no plan worthy of a statesman, but not even the expedients of a politician, this was not because the dangers of the course chosen by the ministers had not been pointed out to them, and by no one more clearly than by Mirabeau. In the previous December he had written to Montmorin that he feared for the authority of the Crown, which had never been so necessary to the nation. And this was his honest conviction. He urged his father to become a candidate. "If elected," he said, "you will be a centre round which those good citizens may rally who know this country and people too well not to dread a republican constitu-

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tion." Everything, he told the minister, indicated that this Assembly, in which the fate of the Monarchy was at stake, was likely to be the most stormy that had ever met. Had the Government a plan which the representatives of the people need only sanction? If not, he, the writer, was prepared to supply one which would secure that the Estates should be a useful servant instead of a dangerous master.

If the virtue of Necker shrank from accepting even the best advice from such a quarter, why did he not listen to his friend Malouet? "Do not wait to receive the orders of the States-General. Beware of upholding what is condemned by experience and public opinion, but do not expose the fundamental bases of the Monarchy and the necessary organs of the royal power to the chance of excited discussion. Assume a decided attitude and have some fixed scheme of concessions and reforms, which may strengthen instead of shattering the foundations of lawful authority."

The king, under cover of the applause which followed Necker's address, hastily left the hall, for, it is said, he had been warned that Mirabeau intended to make himself the mouthpiece of the nation's wishes. However this may be, a speech exists apparently written either to be spoken or to be handed to Lewis XVI. on this occasion. In this Mirabeau asks the king to allow the orders to decide, while still assembled in his presence, whether they shall in future sit together or apart. To allow them to separate is practically to prejudge this important question. "Complete your work, magnanimous prince. You have been inspired by the virtuous impulse to submit even your prerogative to the discus-

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sion of the people, the source assuredly of all sovereignty, but whose acclamations would bestow the sceptre on you, did you not already possess it." The loyalty of the form would scarcely have reconciled a ruler, who still believed himself absolute, to the matter. For it was assumed axiomatically that the Estates were to remodel the constitution as they pleased, and that the king was the delegate of the sovereign people, who might limit his authority as they chose.

Mirabeau's bile was stirred by the cheers which greeted the tedious repetitions, the pompous commonplaces, the empty periods of Necker. He felt what he could have done, had he been minister. "If the man had a vestige of talent," so he wrote to a friend, "he could in a week obtain from us new taxes to the amount of 60,000,000 livres, a loan of 150,000,000, and dismiss us the next day. If he had any strength of character he could play the part of Richelieu. If there was a spark of capacity among his advisers the king would declare himself on the side of the Commons, and we should be prepared to act the second part of the Danish Revolution of 1660. Instead of this, we shall see a striking instance of the truth of Machiavelli's saying that all the misery in the world arises from men not knowing how to be consistently good or consistently bad."

The privileged orders followed the king, and the representatives of the Commons were left in the vast *Salle des Menus*, a large disorganised public meeting. "More than five hundred individuals unknown to each other, gathered from all parts of the kingdom, without a leader, without organisation, all free, all equal, none

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with any authority, none feeling himself under any obligation to obey, and all, like Frenchmen, wishing to be heard before they would listen"—such is the description given by Mirabeau of his colleagues; nor must we forget the large and miscellaneous audience, for which, unfortunately, there was ample space in the galleries, laughing, talking, expressing loudly their approval and disapproval, all but taking part in the debates.

Patriotism, zeal for the public good, loyalty to the king and nation, a spirit of moderation, were not wanting among the majority of the Assembly, which contained men whose character, parts, and eloquence would have honoured any senate. Experience, on the other hand, knowledge of affairs, perception of what was and was not possible, deliberately formed principles and courage to abide by those principles, the power of understanding and influencing the minds and feelings of others, the qualities, in a word, of a statesman were wanting, or were not to be found in that combination which would have made them useful. Here and there was a member who, like Malouet, had learnt something of men and things in the practical work of administration, or who, like Mounier, had gained some experience in the provincial assemblies; but these men were so few that they could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and they were wanting in other qualifications of a parliamentary leader.

These qualifications Mirabeau possessed in the highest degree. He was a man born to lead and not to follow, he knew in what direction he meant to advance and how far. Hardly any question could arise on which he had not meditated and written, with which therefore he was not ready to deal on the spur of the moment, while

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the other members of the Assembly were either unprepared and irresolute, or, hastily referring to principles, deduced *a priori* measures logical perhaps and consistent, but often unpractical or mischievous. This readiness was an advantage which any one can appreciate who has had the slightest experience of the sheeplike docility with which a mixed, unorganised public meeting will follow the man who can bring forward a definite proposal and support it by plausible arguments. Such arguments, either drawn from his own resources or supplied by his workshop of assistants, de Comps, Clavière, Duroveray, Dumont, Pellenc, and the rest, were never wanting to Mirabeau. His moral qualities good and bad, his imperturbable assurance, presence of mind, good-humoured arrogance, even his want of delicacy and boastful self-assertion, were such as might have been expected to increase his influence. His rough-hewn features and shaggy locks were suited, like the mask of an ancient actor, for distant effect. His piercing eyes flashed with indignation or softened with emotion, while his wonderful voice, rolling in measured thunder or sinking into musical but singularly penetrating accents, filled even the spacious hall at Versailles, where only the clearest tones or the most stentorian lungs could be heard, and dominated the clamours of his colleagues and the interruptions of the galleries. We should expect such a man to have at once taken the lead of the Assembly, especially as his opinions, favourable to change but averse from revolution, were undoubtedly in harmony with those of the majority. Yet till after the *Séance Royale* of June 23 his influence could scarcely command a vote in the Assembly; and even after the Third Estate had

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on that memorable occasion acknowledged in him their inspiration and their voice, he was listened to with far more suspicion than conviction. More than once a motion was lost for no other reason than because it was supported by the Count of Mirabeau. The Court, says a contemporary, saw in him only a demagogue, the nobility a renegade, the majority of the Commons an unprincipled adventurer, alliance with whom was both discreditable and dangerous.

As soon as the privileged orders had withdrawn to their separate chambers they proceeded to "verify their powers." Had the Commons done the same, the question whether the Estates were to sit as one Assembly representing the whole French nation, or as three co-ordinate chambers representing three distinct orders, would have been solved in a way fatal to all hope of reform. But the deputies of the Third Estate prudently decided that until their powers were verified, which could only be done by the united Assembly, they were but a meeting of private individuals. They accordingly avoided all action as a corporate body. True to his system of self-advertisement, Mirabeau lost no opportunity of making his voice heard; but his boast that it was he who persuaded the Commons to persevere in their masterly inactivity is quite inconsistent with his bitter complaints of the disfavour and jealousy with which everything he said was received.

By the end of the month the Third Estate were growing weary of inaction, and when he moved (May 27) that "the clergy should be invited to join them in the name of the God of peace and the national welfare," the motion was carried. Yet on the 29th,

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when the ministers offered the mediation of the king, the dexterous address to Lewis XVI., proposed by Mirabeau, was not accepted. It was on the initiative of Sieyès that on June 10 the representatives of the Third Estate, of "nineteen-twentieths" of France, determined to verify their own powers.

Sieyès again prevailed on June 17, when, after the Assembly had "constituted" itself, the question arose, what name should it assume? Representatives of the French People, answered Mirabeau; Representatives of the French Nation, maintained Sieyès. Mirabeau, though suffering from a severe attack of fever, spoke three times with great fervour and eloquence on this question, which was much more than verbal. "People" might be understood either in the narrower sense of commons (*plebs*) or in the wider sense of nation. This happy ambiguity, he insisted, might enable them, should it hereafter be necessary, to assert their authority as the representatives of the sovereign people, while it allowed them to conciliate the other orders by not appearing to refuse to them some place in the constitution. Perhaps Sieyès' proposal was more logical, but they must consider expediency rather than logical consistency. The theorist may disregard obstacles, just as one who travels over a map may pursue an undeviating course across mountains and deserts, neither ravines nor rivers need alarm him; but when a journey has really to be undertaken, then we must remember that we are on the earth and not in an ideal world. Besides, would the king assent to so ambitious a style? Sieyès had maintained that when the people had pronounced, that was enough, no further sanction was

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needed. "No," replied Mirabeau; "I, gentlemen, think the veto of the king so essential a part of the constitution, that without it I had rather live in Constantinople than in France. Yes, I protest that I can conceive nothing more alarming than the despotic oligarchy of 600 individuals."

"Outside the Assembly," says Arthur Young, "the motion of the Count of Mirabeau was better relished than that of the Abbé Sieyès. But his character is a dead weight upon him. There is a suspicion that he has received 100,000 livres from the queen."

So early had the report of a dishonest and mercenary compact with the enemies of the Revolution been added to the other grounds of the distrust with which Mirabeau was regarded. Yet he probably had more weight in the provinces than in the scandal-loving and suspicious metropolis. A little later the same shrewd observer notices that at Marseilles and among his constituents at Aix the liberals held him to be "a politician of great abilities, whose principles were favourable to theirs, while as to his private character they had nothing to do with it." No doubt the paper which, with the help of his Swiss friends, he published under the title of *Courrier de Provence* largely increased his reputation and influence in the country, and must have convinced many readers that he was neither a dangerous incendiary nor an unprincipled political adventurer. Some of his colleagues who had at first been most averse from him, began to suspect that this might be so, after meeting him in private and listening to the good sense and the moderate views round which he threw the glamour of his persuasive eloquence.

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Malouet, who was, although wanting in adroitness, one of the most distinguished among the moderate reformers, was introduced to Mirabeau by Dumont and Duroveray. Mirabeau assured him that he dreaded extreme courses as much as any one. If the ministers could determine on any policy which would at once satisfy the just expectations of the people and secure the Monarchy, instead of drifting helplessly to revolution and anarchy, they might count on his sincere and energetic support. Neither Necker nor Montmorin were his friends, but private feelings should not prevent him from co-operating with them for the public good.

Malouet, although strongly prejudiced against Mirabeau, was convinced of his sincerity and of the great services he could render, and attempted to persuade Montmorin to receive him. But the memory of the Berlin letters was too recent. Necker, after long and silent contemplation of the ceiling, agreed to a meeting. He seemed to think it a good opportunity to make the opponent who had so bitterly and freely criticised his pretensions, feel the interval which separated a needy and discredited political adventurer from the popular Prime Minister, the arbiter between king and people. After his interview with Necker, Mirabeau passed Malouet as he entered the Assembly. "Your man," he said, "is a fool, but he shall hear from me."

Mirabeau was conscious of possessing in his genius the strength, could he only find a secure footing, either to overthrow the tottering Monarchy, or, a more difficult task, to hold it secure above the dangers by which it was beset. He held, if we may be permitted to vary the metaphor, a lever powerful enough to raise, to change

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the position of, or to overturn the Commonwealth, but he needed some fulcrum on which that lever might rest. He could not find this firm basis in the Assembly, where he was regarded with justifiable distrust; he therefore turned in succession to Necker, to the Duke of Orleans, to the Count of Provence, to Lafayette, to the Court, in the hope that they would see the wisdom of the policy which he honestly believed to be the best, and enable him to carry it out, and while carrying it out to occupy that place, the first, in the councils of the nation, to which he aspired. Had his only object been to satisfy an unprincipled ambition, he could, no doubt, have found the support he needed in the favour of the populace, which he well knew how to gain. But this could only be by flattering their passions and follies, by playing the part of a demagogue and adopting a policy of which he disapproved. He would not sell himself unconditionally to the mob for power any more than he would sell himself unconditionally to the Court for money. Such popularity as he could obtain by doing that of which his political conscience approved—or at least did not strongly disapprove—he welcomed and enjoyed.

"Mirabeau perhaps alone had from the beginning a clear conception of the course the Revolution would run," says Malouet, who therefore wonders that he should have advocated measures which led to a catastrophe which he foresaw and deplored. But that catastrophe appeared inevitable to Mirabeau only so long as the State drifted, helplessly and unpiloted, with the tide. If a statesman took the helm there would still be time to steer clear of the breakers. If he himself by force or

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persuasion could lay his hand on the tiller all might yet be well. The greater his popularity the more likely he was to be able to do so: and if, to secure that popularity, he sometimes seemed to forget his fears, we must bear in mind that not only while the fatal reefs were still at a distance the increased violence of the waves might appear no unmixed evil, if it convinced the crew that they needed his skill, but also that the vessel was driving in the direction he wished to follow; in any case he would have steered near the breakers, because between them lay the channel which led to the wished-for haven. It was not his intention to put out to sea, and, because the coast was dangerous, to lose sight of the promised land of liberty and equal rights. If this be granted we must wonder, not that Mirabeau now and again used language which might inflame popular passions, that he sometimes suffered himself to be carried away by the vehemence of debate and the violence of his opponents; rather we must marvel to find him for the most part not only averse from extreme courses but also careful to measure his words—especially if we bear in mind Gambetta's axiom, that a popular statesman must in France be extreme in speech and moderate in act.

Necker was at length convinced that the time had come to assert the authority of the Crown. He proposed that Lewis XVI. should invite the orders to sit together during the present session for the discussion of questions of common interest, determine what matters each order should debate separately, and enumerate the reforms and benefits he intended to secure for his people. It has sometimes been said that Necker's plan might have

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succeeded had it been carried out as proposed by him. This is more than doubtful. It is true that the alterations made by the royal Council in a few articles entirely changed the character of the promised reforms. But could Necker have persuaded the Assembly to recede from the position they had taken up by permitting the king to annul their proceedings? Nor must it be forgotten that he, not less than his opponents in the Council, had intended to guarantee all the privileges of the nobility and clergy, except their immunity from taxation, and to maintain those feudal rights which the nation was determined no longer to tolerate. The "peremptory formulas of a *lit de justice*," which, when addressed to the representatives of the nation, were heard with disgust by many even among the nobles, were put into the king's mouth by Necker. It was he who drafted the well-known sentence spoken by Lewis XVI. after the royal declaration had been read by the Keeper of the Seals: "If you desert me in so fair an enterprise, considering myself their true representative, I will by myself secure my people's happiness." "If," wrote Mirabeau to his constituents, "the king's power is absolute, if sovereignty resides in him, why assemble the representatives of the people to carry out the reforms on which he has determined? If he only wished to learn the wishes of his people, the statements of the wants and grievances of the several parts of the country might have been forwarded through the post."

So far there had been bitter truth in his brother the Viscount's taunt: "Much as Mirabeau talks he is not heard." In the great debate on June 17 he had been listened to with impatience. When on the 20th the

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Assembly found the *Salle des Menus* occupied by work-people and were rudely repulsed from the doors, it was Mounier who proposed the celebrated oath by which they bound themselves not to separate till they had completed the constitution. But on June 23, when nobles and clergy had filed out after the king, while the Commons sat confounded and hesitating and the Marquis of Dreux Brézé was sent to remind them of the concluding sentence of His Majesty's speech, "And now, gentlemen, I order you to separate at once and to meet to-morrow in the rooms assigned to your respective orders, in order that you may resume your deliberations," Mirabeau spoke words which were heard not in the Assembly alone, least perhaps there, but throughout France; nay, ringing defiance to personal monarchy in the name of the sovereign people, they re-echoed to the ends of Europe. What those words exactly were is very uncertain. The honest Bailly, the worthy president of the Third Estate, who had left the study of the stars to drift over the stormy waters of the Revolution with no guiding light except the insufficient and unstable gleams of amiable and well-meaning vanity, gives what appears to be on the whole the most accurate account of this memorable scene, although he is obviously anxious to show that he was himself equal to the occasion and not wholly eclipsed by the self-constituted speaker of the Assembly. Brézé, he says, addressed himself to him: "Sir, you have heard the king's orders"; to which he replied that "the Assembly could only adjourn by its own act." The Grand-master of the Ceremonies then asked whether that was the answer he was to carry to the king; and Bailly answered that it was, and turning

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to the members nearest to him remarked: "I think that the nation when assembled can receive no orders." He knew, he assures us, what was proper too well to make such a reply to Brézé—whereupon Mirabeau exclaimed, "Go, tell those who sent you that the might of bayonets avails nothing against the will of the people" —which, Bailly adds, was highly unbecoming and not to the point, for nothing had been said about bayonets.

"Tell those who sent you that we are here by the will of the people and shall only yield to force." That was the sense of what Mirabeau said when under dramatic circumstances and in dramatic form he asserted the principle, on which the Assembly had acted since June 10, that they, the representatives of the sovereign people, were the supreme power in the State. Whether he had spoken or not, the Commons would doubtless have remained sitting, but the bold way in which the sovereignty by natural right of the people was opposed by Mirabeau to the authority depending on physical force of the Crown, though it would have been no more impediment than a withe of osier to men conscious of their strength and contemptuous of abstractions, like Cromwell or Napoleon, was well calculated to intimidate those who had lost confidence in the principles they maintained, and in the efficacy of the material weapons at their disposal.

When the king was told that the Third Estate had declined to leave the *Salle des Menus*, and was asked for orders, he sulkily replied: "Very well, let them remain"—an answer not in the least determined by Mirabeau's apostrophe to the Master of the Ceremonies, of which Lewis XVI. had heard nothing. Necker, who

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had resigned when outvoted in the Council, was easily persuaded to retain office. The king assured him that he personally attached not the least importance to the declaration of his intentions so solemnly proclaimed, and on June 27 the victory of the Commons was completed by the appearance in their midst, in obedience to the royal commands, of those deputies of the nobility and clergy who had hitherto refused to join them. Once more the king's advisers had done their best to convince his people that his intentions were mischievous, his authority contemptible.

Unsuccessful and weak opposition was likely to inflame still further the popular fervour, to assist the schemes of those—and it was clear that there were such—who hoped to profit by anarchy and revolution. Mirabeau proposed that the Assembly should issue an address to the nation recommending moderation and calm; pointing out the good intentions of the king, and that what had been done amiss was due to bad advice; that the abolition of feudalism was indeed in the interests of both monarch and people, yet that not all who opposed reform were necessarily bad men. "Fellow-citizens, whose aim like ours is the public good, but who seek it in another direction; men who under the sway of the prejudices of education and of the habits of childhood have not the strength to turn against the stream, who tremble for their property, who fear that liberty may be the pretext of licence—all such men deserve that we should treat them with consideration. . . . Our fate depends on our wisdom; nothing but our violence can imperil that liberty which reason secures to us." Admirable and surely well-timed words, and it is a proof

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of the hostility with which Mirabeau was regarded that they should have been heard without the slightest sign of approbation.

When, in obedience to the royal commands, the nobility and clergy joined the Commons, the shouts of "*Vive le Roi!*" were so loud and continuous that they could be heard as far as Marli. The popular enthusiasm extended even to the queen. It is clear that, in spite of the fatal mistakes that had already been made, the loyalty of Frenchmen was not yet extinct, and that all moderate men, the vast majority both in and outside the Assembly, would have rallied round the throne, had any trouble been taken to inspire them with confidence in the intentions of the king and his advisers. Instead of this, with a strange mixture of military circumstance and sinister mystery, some 20,000 or 30,000 troops, for the most part foreigners, were collected round Versailles, and more were known to be on the march, when Necker was dismissed on July 11.

What was the plan of the new ministry? It is probable that nothing had been decided. It is certain that the intentions of the king were not the same as those of Artois and the Polignacs. The Court no doubt trusted that, when the military preparations were completed, the influence of the queen and the dread of anarchy might induce the king to sanction a vigorously repressive policy, although they may scarcely have determined what shape that policy should take. It was probably for this reason that they tolerated, even if they did not actually encourage, the disorders in Paris, and left Besenval, the military commander, without orders or effective support.

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There appeared at first some reason for hoping that the Assembly would begin its labours with as much moderation and harmony as could be expected from a body of 1200 men representing interests so divergent, and so little disposed by national character and inexperience of public life to submit to compromise and to that sacrifice of logical consistency which can scarcely be avoided in conducting the affairs of a great nation. The members of the privileged orders were treated with consideration. The Archbishop of Vienne, a moderate man of high character, was chosen president with little opposition, and the prudent and patriotic Mounier was supreme in the Committee to which the task of drafting a scheme for the future constitution had been entrusted.

Unfortunately many among the nobles and a few of the clergy not only affected a scornful indifference during the debates, talking among themselves and disturbing the speakers by unmannerly interruptions, but also adopted the fatal policy of voting in favour of every extravagance which might bring the Assembly into contempt or aggravate anarchy until it became unendurable. It was another source of many future evils that a body too large under the most favourable conditions for orderly and business-like discussion should have scorned the precautions which might have done something not only to secure its dignity, but even to preserve it from hasty and ill-considered resolutions. Mirabeau had procured from his friend Romilly a statement of the rules observed by the English House of Commons. But when he laid it upon the table of the Assembly there were cries among the members that

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they were not Englishmen, and needed no lessons from England.

Mirabeau had found no place in the Committee on the Constitution; he was listened to with impatience, and his increased popularity out of doors only added to the suspicion with which he was regarded. Again, however, he seized the opportunity of speaking in the name of the Assembly when others were wanting either in the presence of mind or the courage to say that which the occasion required. On July 6 he had heard that Marshal Broglie, the hero of the Court, had been appointed commander-in-chief. For some days every one had been convinced that the dismissal of Necker was imminent, and would be the signal for an attempt to induce the king to sanction a policy of repression. On July 8 Mirabeau proposed a "humble address" begging His Majesty to remove the troops from the neighbourhood of Versailles and Paris. He said that even from their own point of view the advisers of the Crown were acting foolishly. How imprudent it was to expose the troops to the disturbing contact of the capital, to teach them to interest themselves in political controversy! Once let the army be invaded by party-spirit and there would be an end of discipline. Sedition and mutiny would walk abroad unabashed, the vigour to enforce martial law would be wanting, and society would be threatened by the most hideous anarchy, in which alone mutinous soldiers can hope for impunity. "Have the rash and foolish men who have misled the king studied the causes and the course of revolutions in the past? Have they seen by what fatal concatenation of circumstances the wisest are carried beyond the

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limits of moderation, by what dread impulse a frenzied people is hurried towards excesses, from the first thought of which it would have shrunk in horror?" He concluded by urging that the king should be asked to sanction the formation of a citizen militia to preserve order and tranquillity. Although the anarchy spreading through the country was a convincing proof of the wisdom of this proposal, it was coldly received, while the project of an address asking for the removal of the troops was eagerly adopted; and Mirabeau reaped the fruit of his first oratorical triumph when he was chosen to draft the petition to the king, and to be one of the deputation by which it was presented. While the Count of Clermont Tonnerre was reading the address, the eyes of Lewis XVI. are said to have remained fixed upon the man who for the second time had put himself forward as the mouthpiece of those who opposed his authority.

Protestations of loyalty and affection for his person were not wanting: "Too much love," said Rivarol, "for so many threats, and too many threats for so much love." Nor was it the act of a disloyal subject plainly to warn the monarch of the perils which beset the path into which he had been misled. "Danger, Sire, threatens the labours which are our first duty, and which can only produce a satisfactory and enduring result if the nation is satisfied that they have been performed free from all suspicion of coercion. There is besides a contagion in passionate emotions. We are only men. Want of confidence in ourselves, the fear of appearing weak, may carry us beyond our goal. We are beset on all sides by violent and extreme counsels. The utterances of calm

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reason and wisdom are inaudible in the midst of disorder, tumult, and factious violence. . . . Great revolutions have sprung from less startling causes. Many an enterprise, fatal to nations and princes, has been heralded by signs less sinister and alarming." During the eventful three days which followed Necker's dismissal, the orator was not seen in the Assembly. The old Marquis was lying dead at Argenteuil. Mirabeau had undoubtedly some affection for his father. He was so devoid of rancour, that he forgave not only the injuries he received but even those which he inflicted. It may therefore have been sincere grief, as well as decency and the necessity of attending to family affairs, which caused him to be absent while the Assembly sat day and night (13th to 15th July), harassed by fears for their own safety, distracted by reports of the disorders at Paris, and seeking to prove that not even the shock of a crumbling world could shake them in their firm and righteous determination to create a constitution for their country.

It was not till July 15, when it was known that the Bastille had fallen, that Mirabeau reappeared in the Assembly. In the nineteenth letter to his constituents, he reports the violent answer he proposed to the hesitating reply made by the king to the reiterated demand that the troops should be removed and Necker recalled. "Tell him that the foreign hordes by whom we are surrounded received yesterday the visit of the princes and princesses, and of their favourites, both male and female. Exhortations, caresses, presents, were lavished on them. Tell him that these foreign satellites, gorged with gold and drunken with wine, foretold the slavery

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of France in their impious songs, and in brutal vows called down destruction upon the National Assembly. Tell him that even in his palace his courtiers joined in the dance to the sound of this barbarous music, and that such also was the prelude to St. Bartholomew's Day. Tell him that that Henry whose memory is blessed by the universe, that ancestor whom he chose as his model, sent provisions into rebellious Paris, while his ferocious ministers turn back the bread with which commerce would supply his loyal and starving capital!" This may seem rant and fustian, meant for the ears of the galleries at Versailles and the Parisian mob, but it is only fair to remember that the royalist Ferrières did not think the language stronger than the occasion warranted, and believed that nothing but the fall of the Bastille and the revolt of Paris prevented the violent measures which had been determined on against the Assembly, and which already inspired the courtiers with insolent triumph.

Less excusable are the apologies made by Mirabeau, in the same number of his paper, for the popular excesses. "How great," he exclaims, "must be the virtue and moderation of the people, since, even when the dungeons of the Bastille disclosed the secret atrocities of despotism, they were not provoked to greater bloodshed! The oppressors of the people calumniate it and affect to fear it, in order that they may excuse their tyranny and deaden their conscience! If these events had taken place at Constantinople, we should all say that this was an act of popular justice, that the punishment of one vizier would be a lesson to others!"

An abominable and cold-blooded apology for murder,

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says Tocqueville; how much worse, adds M. de Loménie, than that exclamation in the heat of debate—"Was the blood then that was shed so innocent?"—bitterly repented by the impetuous, but humane and generous, Barnave! Perhaps we must allow that the weighty and prophetic words with which Mirabeau concludes prove him to have been sinning against light. "Society would soon be dissolved if the multitude, accustomed to riot and bloodshed, domineered over the magistrates and despised the law. The people, instead of hastening to liberty, would soon fall headlong into slavery. For danger too often reconciles men to absolutism, and in the midst of anarchy even a despot may be hailed as a saviour!" Yet we must not forget how universal was the joy felt after July 14 by all who sympathised with liberty and progress. No other event was ever hailed with a tithe of the enthusiasm which the fall of the Bastille excited from the banks of the Neva to those of the Mississippi. That legendary prison was the symbol to the world of arbitrary oppression, of the old order with all its abuses. To the Parisians and to the liberals at Versailles the capture of the fortress, which was supposed to threaten the capital with its artillery, meant much more. It was the end of the nightmare of terror—all the more horrible because so vague—by which they had been oppressed during the last days. Even the Venetian envoy, a conservative by instinct and position, and soon a bitter critic of the Revolution, shared in the joy and enthusiasm which he describes to his government. Keen observers on the spot, such as the English and Austrian ambassadors, Dorset and Mercy-Argenteau, did not know, as we do now, that

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the governor of the Bastille was no ruthless soldier, but an undecided and humane old gentleman; that the Provost of the Merchants was no traitor, but a weak magistrate who sought to gain time by ill-devised expedients; that the so-called victors of the Bastille were a set of scoundrelly ruffians; that the men who really took the castle showed their courage less in overcoming the scarcely serious resistance of a few veterans and Swiss than in doing their best to defend their prisoners against the cowardly cruelty of the mob. Great revolutions, especially at a time of public misery, and when many factious men are interested in prolonging disorder, can scarcely be accomplished without the occurrence of events painful to law-abiding citizens. But how much more numerous would be the victims of triumphant reaction, how much more lasting the sufferings it would cause! Thus did many who were much more scrupulous than Mirabeau reason even after the murders of Foulon and Berthier.

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CHAPTER VI

Mirabeau's popularity—Generosity of La Marck—The Declaration of Rights—The 4th of August.

DUMONT tells that when Mirabeau visited the ruins of the Bastille his carriage was filled with flowers and relics offered by an enthusiastic mob, and when a few days previously he and his brother the Viscount attended the funeral of their father, the crowd raised loud cheers for the "pock-marked Mirabeau." He had for some time back carefully cultivated his popularity in Paris. He had made advances to men like Robespierre and Buzot, who began to have influence among the more fanatical revolutionists of the capital; he sought the acquaintance of Camille Desmoulins. "The Attorney-General of the lantern" yielded to the fascination of his society. "I felt for Mirabeau," he wrote, "all the affection of a lover," yet he feared that the generous Burgundy and the delicate dishes he so much enjoyed at the table of his aristocratic friend, were scarcely compatible with republican austerity.

Mirabeau was assiduous in his attendance at the meetings of his district, and constantly visited the capital, hurrying thither, complains Bailly, twice in the day from Versailles to pay his court to the

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rabble. When Regnault de St.-Jean d'Angély brought forward a motion prohibiting members of the Assembly from attending the meetings of the districts, his indignation betrayed how nearly he was touched by the proposal. "I will wring tears of blood from you," he exclaimed, as he started from his place to oppose the motion in the tribune.

Mirabeau's attitude at this time is probably to be explained by the hope he had conceived of replacing Bailly, the nominee of the electors, as Mayor of Paris. Nothing, he assured La Marck, but his absence owing to his father's death prevented him from being preferred to Bailly on July 15, since he was better known and better liked, and the matter had been decided by popular acclamation. It is obvious how valuable such a position would have been to him. All that his ambition aimed at would be comparatively easy and attainable if he were the chief magistrate of Paris, the chosen ruler of the democracy of the capital. Then he would be a power whom the ministers would be eager to conciliate, with whom the Court would be glad to conclude an alliance on his own terms, from whom Lafayette could no longer hold aloof in Grandisonian self-conceit. But more, much more than all this, he would be brought into direct relations with the king. If only he could bring Lewis XVI. under the charm of his personal influence, what a future lay before him! He did not wish to play the part of Strafford, for he cared even more for liberty than for good administration. Differing most from his father and the physiocrats in this dislike of arbitrary government, he did not believe in the regeneration of a country by benevolent despotism.

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Although he was by conviction a royalist, his royalism did not imply personal loyalty to Lewis XVI. He held that a constitutional and progressive monarchy was the only government suited to the needs of France, and, provided that the Count of Mirabeau was minister, would probably have cared very little under what king he served. For a time he seems to have thought that an alliance with the Duke of Orleans might secure for him the position to which he aspired. But Mirabeau soon found that there was nothing in common between his views and those of the political adventurers who surrounded the prince, and that it was impossible to place any confidence in his indolently vicious character. "They pretend," he said, "that I am of his party—I would not have him for my footman."

He had continued the acquaintance begun during the previous year with the Count of La Marck. It is no small testimony in Mirabeau's favour that he should not only have convinced an honourable and clear-sighted man of the world that his intentions were honest, but that he should also have inspired him with a true and lasting affection. "The Count of Mirabeau," wrote La Marck, "had great faults in common with many other men, but we rarely find such great and noble qualities united in one individual. . . . It is only after continuous and intimate intercourse with such a man that it is possible to realise of what elevated thoughts and of what deep affections we are capable."

Prince Augustus of Arenberg, the second son of Duke Charles of Arenberg, had inherited from his maternal grandfather, the direct descendant of the Wild Boar of the Ardennes, his title of La Marck and the proprietor-

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ship of a German regiment in the French service, which he himself commanded with distinction in India under Bussy. On his return to France he was appointed Inspector-General of Infantry. Marie Antoinette never forgot that he had been particularly recommended to her favour by Maria Theresa. The goodwill of the queen, his high rank, his wealth, his merits, his friendship with the Austrian ambassador, Mercy-Argenteau, made the Count of La Marck an important person at the French Court. Although an Austrian subject, he was elected one of the representatives of the nobility of Quesnoy, a district in which he possessed an estate; and although he had not joined the liberal minority of nobles in the Assembly, he was no bigoted opponent of moderate reforms. "I can always agree," said Mirabeau, "with an aristocrat such as you are." When, towards the end of June, La Marck invited his acquaintance to dinner, Mirabeau's first words were, "You are very vexed with me, are you not?" "Yes," said his host, "with you and with many others." "If so, you should begin with the people in the palace. The vessel of the State is driving before the storm and there is no one at the helm," and he went on to inveigh violently against Necker, insisting upon his incompetence even as a financier. "But," said La Marck, "what is the aim of your incendiary policy?" "The fate of France is decided, the words 'liberty, taxes voted by the people,' have re-echoed throughout the kingdom, there is no escape from a constitution more or less like that of England"; it was not, he continued, his fault if his overtures were rejected by the Government, and if he was compelled to place himself at the head of the popular party. When

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the king's ministers condescended to reason with him, they would find him devoted to the king and to the preservation of the Monarchy. The existing policy of not attempting to lead or influence the Assembly, of trusting either to subdue it by force in the end or to fascinate it by the empty magniloquence of M. Necker, would be the ruin of the country. A few days later Mirabeau again dined with La Marck, and whispered on leaving, "Let them know in the palace that I am more their friend than their enemy."

La Marck was convinced that the king could have no more useful adviser than the man whom the Court hated as an unscrupulous opponent. But it was not till the end of September that he was able to make the suggestion to the queen, and then only indirectly through a lady-in-waiting. There was little to encourage him in Marie Antoinette's answer: "We shall never, I hope, be reduced to such extremities as to be obliged to have recourse to Mirabeau." She certainly had no reason to like or trust him. He had done his utmost to prevent the release of her friend Besenval, and although he had always spoken of Lewis XVI. with respect, he had encouraged the belief in his wife's malign influence, and, it is not too much to say, had held her up to public execration. Yet La Marck did not abandon all hope of seeing his friend serve the king. He was impressed by Mirabeau's sinister forebodings, and believed him to be the only man capable of overcoming the dangers he so clearly foresaw. "What are these people thinking of? Can they not see the gulf yawning before their feet? Yes," he repeated to the horrified La Marck, "all is lost, the king and queen will perish and the mob will

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spurn their corpses. Even you do not realise how dangerous their position is, and yet they ought to be made to understand it." The feeling with which Mirabeau spoke convinced the Count that he was not the king's enemy, and he believed in the sincerity of his gratitude to himself for an act of true and generous friendship.

He had lent him money soon after the death of his father, and proposed henceforth to advance to him 50 louis monthly, which, with his allowance as deputy (18 livres per diem), would enable him to live till he was in a position to settle with his creditors, who would be less pressing now that they had the security of the property into the possession of which he would come when his father's estate was wound up. Mirabeau, it seems, did not think it necessary to explain the hopeless confusion of his father's affairs to his friend, nor that nothing had been left to him except the settled estates, the income of which was insufficient to pay the interest on mortgages and other encumbrances. "I told him," says La Marck, "that if he accepted my proposal, I hoped that he would be in a position of independence and enabled to devote himself wholly to the public good and to his own fame. I cannot reproduce all his expressions of friendship. The heartfelt and convincing eloquence with which he gave utterance to his emotions confirmed me more and more in my conviction that there was much in the heart of such a man on which one might safely rely; and here I would repeat that up to the time of his death his actions never belied the feelings he professed for me. More than once when, irritated by his revolutionary language in the Assembly,

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I abused him with much temper, I have seen him weep like a child and express his repentance with unmistakable and dignified sorrow."

"Mirabeau scolded and weeping like a child! What a comedian!" we are tempted to exclaim. Yet this would be unjust. An actor he was, but not a conscious one, like the other great man of the Revolution, Bonaparte. When once he had given the rein to his feelings, whether in speech or writing or action, they swept him away with them. He did not play a part, he felt it; for the time he was what he seemed to be. The Mirabeau of to-morrow might be very different from the Mirabeau of to-day. The Mirabeau of the Assembly, carried away by the applause of the galleries, or goaded by the insults of the Right, was not the same as the Mirabeau who, in solitude or in the company of some judicious friend, penned those admirable notes for the Court, or even as the Mirabeau who, when at length he had reached the chair of President of the Constituent, set himself with conviction to play the part of a moderating and guiding power in that turbulent and disorganised body. Neither was he a hypocrite when he deplored with sighs and tears, as he frequently would, "the great injury the irregularities of his youth had inflicted on the Commonwealth," and hurried, perhaps on the same evening, to debaucheries scarcely less disreputable.

In the beginning of July 1789 the Assembly set about the task of creating the constitution, and although an account of their labours would carry us far beyond our limits, it is necessary to attempt to convey some general impression of Mirabeau's policy during the three months which preceded the forcible removal of

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king and Assembly from Versailles to Paris. No act of the Constituent Assembly has been more generally criticised and blamed than the promulgation of the Declaration of Rights. That Robespierre and Marat should have pronounced it the one good piece of work accomplished by that body may seem to damn it beyond all possibility of apology. But does not this almost universal reprobation arise from the fact that it is judged by the light of subsequent calamities with which it had little if any connection? Had the Constituent been framing a constitution in quiet times, the Declaration of Rights would have passed muster as a somewhat high-flown but harmless preamble.

No doubt it would have been better to found the new constitution on the rights of Frenchmen rather than on those of abstract man. The Bill of Rights was a better, a more practical piece of work than the Declaration of Rights. But what if the materials out of which the former was constructed by the English Parliament were wholly wanting to the French Assembly? It is unreasonable to deride a man for living under the flimsy shelter of a tent if he has neither stones nor bricks nor timber wherewith to build a house. Could Burke, who blamed the French for not building on the foundation and with the materials of their old constitution, have pointed out where those materials were scattered or what was the plan of that foundation? One thing perhaps was known about it—that it was based on that division of the nation into orders which the country was determined no longer to tolerate.

It must not be forgotten that the Assembly proclaimed nothing new. Philosophers and pamphleteers had for

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a generation past been dinning these principles into men's ears. They had been appealed to as the charter of freedom on the other side of the Atlantic. They had been received as the truths of a new gospel not at philosophic suppers only, but at the crossways and under the trees of the Palais Royal. The recognition of them by the Assembly did not create the public faith in their validity: it was an effect and not a cause. Nor should it be overlooked that, so far from the excesses of the Revolution being deducible from these abstract axioms, they were, for the most part, in direct contravention to them.

Mirabeau is often praised for the practical wisdom he showed in proposing that the Declaration of Rights should not be published until the constitution was completed, yet he had voted with the majority that a declaration of the rights of man should precede the constitution. He was named one of a committee of five to formulate them, and he was chosen by the committee to draw up their report. It was only after the draft of a declaration of rights, which he had composed with the assistance of Dumont and Duroveray, and which was certainly more objectionable than that ultimately adopted, had been rejected, that he began to maintain that the most pressing duty of the Assembly was to put an end to the existing anarchy; that abstract principles were dangerous weapons, which the people might misuse to their own hurt, and then cast away in disgust; and that the constitution should at any rate be completed before the Declaration of Rights was promulgated. He proclaimed these views in the tribune to the indignant surprise of the Left. Though he

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spoke with good sense and moderation, it was difficult for him to obtain a hearing. He had indeed laid his finger on the most dangerous mistake of the Assembly, which erred far less in publishing these axioms than in wasting precious time and irrecoverable opportunities in the most futile of academic discussions, less practical, more windy, infinitely more tedious than the proceedings of any discussion-forum or undergraduates' debating society. Member after member would climb the tribune to read his pretentious essay, quite regardless whether the same arguments had been advanced before or not, and answering, as Mirabeau complained, every objection except those that had really been made. Such an exhibition on the part of a body entrusted with the destinies of a great people would at any time have been contemptible; it was criminal when, as the Venetian envoy wrote, only those who actually saw it could realise the condition of the country. The ministers did not attempt to govern, the executive was inactive, the law-courts were in abeyance, district was arrayed against district, province against province, the towns were thronged with unemployed labourers and vagabonds, the treasury was empty, and the taxes unpaid.

The Constituent Assembly, when it proclaimed, on the memorable night of August 4, the abolition of all feodality as tyrannical and barbarous, and then told the people that until they could purchase their freedom they must continue to endure no small part of this tyranny, committed an error more immediately mischievous than the promulgation of the Declaration of Rights. How like our French, said Mirabeau, to spend a month in argument about syllables and then to destroy in one night

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the whole fabric of the ancient Monarchy! He himself had left the Assembly before the delirious scene in which, as Rivarol observes, the representatives of nobility and clergy sought, like Japanese, their honour in public suicide.

In his correspondence with his uncle, Mirabeau acknowledges the risk which the rising edifice ran of being overwhelmed under the ruins of what had been too hastily and inconsiderately destroyed, but he does not pretend to regret any part of that which had perished. "I have good hope for the future, because the Revolution, whether we approve of it or not, is now an accomplished fact. Intelligent men must see that further resistance is equally useless and disastrous. Whether ardent patriots or not, whether partisans of this or that system, the object of all must now be the same, to enable the State to come to an equilibrium in its present position. After the machine has been set going we shall be able to judge of what is right and what is amiss. If there are imperfections or worse errors, another legislature may remedy them. If it is necessary to turn backwards, even this may be done, when our road is no longer beset by precipices; it will at any rate be easier to make the attempt on level ground than when on a steep incline. Much may be possible in peace that cannot be done in the midst of strife and anarchy." Unfortunately the Court and the greater part of the nobility were too blind to see that the Revolution was an accomplished fact; they had too little intelligence to recognise that further resistance must be disastrous. There were also among their opponents many who thought that their interest lay

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in the continuation of disorder, and who found it an easy matter, their adversaries playing into their hands, to inflame the hopes and fears of the people: hopes of an impossible millennium, fears lest all that they had obtained and justly valued might be snatched from them.

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CHAPTER VII

The veto—Mirabeau supports Necker—His greater influence in the Assembly—The 5th of October—The King brought to Paris.

MIRABEAU is usually commended for having thrown off the demagogue and assumed the statesman in the debates on the constitution. Yet he was one of the warmest opponents of the moderate scheme propounded to the Assembly on August 31 by Lally-Tollendal and Mounier in the name of the Committee on the Constitution, according to which the legislature was to be composed of two chambers. There seems to be good reason to believe that had the members followed their honest convictions, the Assembly would have accepted the proposals of the Committee. The majority would not indeed have been large. The Right were determined to oppose measures the very moderation of which made them fear that they might be the basis of a permanent settlement and therefore prevent the restoration of the old order. The theorists, the followers of Rousseau, rejected what appeared to be a copy of the English constitution contemned by their master. Lastly, there was a small but active, unscrupulous, and dangerous faction, generally identified with the partisans of the Duke of Orleans, but containing other demagogues

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and political adventurers, who saw their advantage in the continuation of disorder. All these would in any case have opposed a constitution after the English model.

The aristocratic element in the scheme of the moderates, the second chamber, was most unpopular and most criticised within the Assembly; the monarchical element, the king's right to refuse his sanction, or his right of veto, as it was unfortunately called, was most denounced by those who appealed to popular passion. It became to the multitude an unknown terror, a mysterious curse destined to blast their cherished hopes. It even assumed a personal shape in their imagination. Cries of "To the lantern with the veto!" were repeatedly heard: it was asked in what district this veto lived? The more intelligent believed it to be a new tax. Their leaders sought to enlighten this ignorance. "You are eating your porridge, the king comes in and says 'Throw down your bowl,' that is the veto."

In objecting to a house of peers or senate Mirabeau was not inconsistent. He had never been an admirer of the British constitution. In his *Adresse aux Bataves* he prophesied that the vaunted system of balanced powers would soon, unless reformed, reduce England to the fatal lethargy of bondage. He believed that the Americans had allowed themselves to be too much influenced by English precedents and by the authority of Montesquieu, whom he called an overrated man. It was, he said, an insult to Machiavelli to mention the two in the same breath. No doubt the genius of the Florentine was the more practical and masculine, but there is something ominous in the exaltation on the

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threshold of the Revolution of the most cynical and logical asserter of the principle that the end justifies the means, of the interest of the State as the supreme law of political conduct, especially when we remember those sinister maxims, so soon to receive their most ferocious application, that liberty must be cemented by the blood of the sons of Brutus, that he who would set up a republic in a land where there are many nobles will not succeed unless he slay them all, that where the freedom and safety of our country are at stake, we must abandon every consideration of justice and injustice, of mercy and cruelty, of honour and dishonour.

It is remarkable that, while Mirabeau's opposition to a senate, a matter about which the populace was comparatively indifferent, increased his popularity, it was not diminished by his defence of the king's right of veto. His name was not mentioned or was mentioned only in praise by the fervid speakers who, at the street corners, held Mounier and the other moderate reformers up to execration and future vengeance. When Mirabeau visited Paris the crowd clung to him and begged him with tears to save them from this monstrous thing. Although disgusted by his tergiversation on the question of the Declaration of Rights, the Extreme Left probably expected that the furious enmity of the nobles would drive Mirabeau to join their ranks, and did not wish to make the accession of so powerful an ally more difficult. The Orleanists may still have hoped to secure his co-operation, for he continued to see a good deal, if not of the Duke himself, yet of the wire-pullers of the faction, such as Lauzun and Laclos. At all events the stump-orators and pamphleteers in the

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pay of the Palais Royal seem to have been instructed not to mention him in their diatribes. The part he played in the debate on the royal sanction made it comparatively easy to throw dust into the eyes of an ignorant public. He spoke with less than his usual vigour and lucidity; he was absent from the final division.

Mirabeau took frequent part in the other debates on the constitution during the summer months of 1789, and raised his reputation by the good sense and moderation with which he generally spoke. But it was when the representatives were obliged to turn their attention from the lofty task of discussing the foundations and first principles of political society to the necessities of a bankrupt exchequer, that they began to recognise the presence among them of one who towered head and shoulders above his fellows.

It was the impossibility of avoiding bankruptcy without the assistance of the Estates which had forced the Government to convene the representatives of the nation. Yet since they had met nothing had been done to mitigate and everything had happened which could aggravate the financial distress. The whole fiscal system was paralysed, hardly any taxes, direct or indirect, had been paid during the last few months. In many places the offices of the tax-collectors were forced, whatever money was in them plundered, the registers and accounts burnt, the officials ill-treated. It was absolutely necessary to find money. Even if soldiers and sailors might be left unpaid, Paris must be fed.

On August 4 Necker appeared before the Assembly and convinced them that the urgent needs of the State required a loan of 30,000,000 livres. At current quota-

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tions money invested in the funds paid 6 or 7 per cent. Necker therefore, who had made arrangements to float his loan at 5 per cent, had done very well. But it seemed to the representatives of the nation that the security of a loan sanctioned by them was greater than that of the ordinary public debt, and they therefore decided that the interest was only to be 4½ per cent. The result was that barely 2,000,000 livres were subscribed. Necker then suggested a loan of 80,000,000 at 5 per cent. Talleyrand, who by much gambling on the Stock Exchange had gained authority and experience in financial matters, proposed that the Assembly should sanction the loan and leave the management of it entirely to the minister, and at the same time sustain the national credit by a resolution declaring that never, under any circumstances, would the creditors of the State be defrauded of a farthing justly their due.

Less than half the new loan was subscribed, and again (September 24) the Swiss saviour of France had to appear before the Assembly and "with agonised hands unveil the picture of the nation's ruin." He ended by proposing an income-tax of 25 per cent as the only means of averting bankruptcy.

Mirabeau urged that the proposals of the minister should be adopted at once and without discussion. Even could a better scheme be devised it would need to be examined, criticised, debated, and all this would cause delay when delay was fatal. Besides the best scheme might fail, and in that case it was well that the responsibility should rest on the minister. The Monarchy would not be endangered should it prove that M. Necker had made a mistake, but it would be a public

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calamity, the nation would have one resource the less, if the Assembly was discredited by failure in so important a matter. He spoke three times in the debate, and the third time he ascended the tribune it was to achieve one of the greatest of his oratorical triumphs.

The carefully constructed periods, the elaborate rhetoric, the studied effects of an artist in words, like Burke, may be as effective when read in the closet as they were when heard by the audience to which they were first addressed, but no written report can convey to us any adequate idea of such a speech as this of Mirabeau's, conceived and spoken by a great orator in the heat of debate. The *Journal de Paris*, in describing the overpowering effect produced on the audience, aptly quotes Aeschines' compliment to his great rival: "What would you have felt had you seen and heard the beast!" "When," says Dumont, "proceeding to remark upon the dangerous state of public credit and the failure of the revenue, he represented a national bankruptcy as the probable consequence of the rejection of this plan, the force with which he presented so commonplace an idea was miraculous; he elevated it to sublimity. They who heard this speech will never forget it; it excited every gradation of terror, and a devouring gulf, with the groans of the victims it swallowed, seemed pictured to the senses of the audience."

The triumph was complete: not an attempt was made to reply, and the project was adopted without a dissentient voice. From that day the superiority of Mirabeau was acknowledged. He had no rival. There were indeed other orators, but he alone was eloquent. "Molé, the celebrated actor, was present. The form

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and dramatic effect of Mirabeau's eloquence, and the sublimity of his voice, had made a deep impression upon this distinguished comedian, who with visible emotion approached the orator to offer his compliments. 'Ah! M. le Comte,' said he in a pathetic tone of voice, 'what a speech! and with what an accent did you deliver it! You have surely missed your vocation.' Molé smiled on perceiving the singularity of the compliment which his dramatic enthusiasm had led him to utter, but Mirabeau was much flattered at it."

Mirabeau's position in the beginning of October 1789 was very different from what it had ever been before. His popularity made him a power in Paris, he had proved that his eloquence could influence the votes of the Assembly. We may trace in the Journal of Adrian Duquesnoy the change in the feelings towards him of many among his colleagues. For Duquesnoy, although La Marck says he was not without talents, had not sufficient ability or insight to prevent his opinions from representing fairly enough those of the average well-meaning, intelligent middle-class member of the Assembly. Writing of Mirabeau on May 7, he says: "The man is a wild beast, a madman. He has the expression of a tiger. When he speaks it is in paroxysms: his face is distorted, his voice hisses with passion. Moreover he speaks ill. His French is detestable, his arguments sophistical, full of inconsistencies and fallacies. All men of intelligence believe that he wishes to bring about the dissolution of the Estates and the fall of the ministry because Necker would not pay him his price." A little later he writes that Mirabeau is as little listened to as ever, and calls his paper "an atrocious publication."

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Then by degrees he begins to allow that he can be eloquent, even that the opinions he professes are sound and moderate, but his character justifies the general distrust. By the middle of August he is convinced that the fear of Mirabeau is exaggerated. It is his interest to establish his reputation as a statesman, and it is not likely that he would commit crimes certain to defeat his object. He excels all his colleagues in talents, genius, and knowledge. His constitutional views are sound and moderate, and in any case he is too much distrusted to be dangerous. Before the end of October Duquesnoy thinks that "Mirabeau alone has the genius, the talents, and the strength of character to extricate us from the fearful chaos into which we are plunged. The circumstances are such that he must be minister. Yet perhaps a short delay is necessary in order that the public may recognise that private immorality is no obstacle to public virtue."

This was written after the events of the 5th and 6th of October, and in spite of the suspected complicity of Mirabeau in the guilt of those days of "shame, oppression, perjury." It was recognised from the first that the march on Versailles of the scum of the female population of Paris, accompanied by not a few male ruffians, some of them disguised as women, supplied with money, with arms, and even with food, was no spontaneous popular movement, no "genuine outburst of nature," but the product of elaborate art; and an attempt to discover the artificers was subsequently made before the Châtelet. Next to the Duke of Orleans, and as his confederate, Mirabeau was most strongly suspected. His reputation, the belief that he was as bold and unscrupulous as he

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was needy and ambitious, made this inevitable. But not only did the Châtelet discover no proof whatever of his guilt, not only were friends like La Marck convinced of his innocence, he was also acquitted by men who, to say the least, had no bias in his favour, such as Mallet du Pan, Bertrand de Molleville, Rivarol, Rabaut de St. Étienne, and even Lafayette himself. It is certain that he at this time had no relations of any kind and still less any understanding with the Palais Royal, and the little evidence which was adduced to prove the contrary referred to a much earlier period.

On the morning of October 5 two subjects were discussed by the Assembly—a letter from the king deferring his sanction of the Declaration of Rights till after the completion of the constitution, and the "orgy," as it was called, of the Body-guard and their guests, the officers of the regiment of Flanders.

It appeared likely that the Assembly would pass some violent motion denying to the king all right of interference or even of expressing an opinion on constitutional questions. Mirabeau, after conciliating his audience by a violent preamble, dexterously averted such a blow to the prerogative by proposing that Lewis XVI. should be invited to explain his remarks, and thus remove any apprehension that he did not intend to sanction the Declaration of Rights. As to the denunciation by Pétion of plots against the Assembly and of seditious cries and gestures at the military banquet, he said that it would be well to ask that such festivities might in future be prohibited, since they were likely to lead to excesses on both sides. A member of the Right proposing that Pétion should be ordered to specify in

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writing and sign his charges, Mirabeau exclaimed, "I must begin by protesting that I consider such a denunciation highly impolitic. But, if the demand is persisted in, I am prepared to furnish full details—provided that the king alone be declared beyond the reach of the law"; and as he left the tribune he added in a stage-whisper, "I shall denounce the queen and the Duke of Guiche." He subsequently alleged that his object was to deter the Right by this threat from raising a debate, the issue of which might have been most deplorable.

Soon after half-past eleven it began to be reported in Versailles that an armed crowd was coming from Paris. There is no proof that Mirabeau had any special intelligence, although from his intimacy at the time with Camille Desmoulins this is not impossible. However this may be, he went up to Mounier, then presiding, and said, "Paris is marching on us. Say you are ill. Go to the Palace and warn them, say, if you like, that I told you. There is not a moment to lose." But Mounier, still hot with indignation at his informant's attack on the queen, retorted, "Very well, it will be a good thing for the country, provided they kill all of us, kill all, do you hear?" "A pretty speech," Mirabeau replied, and left the Assembly. He went to the lodgings of his friend La Marck, dined with him, and returned in his company to the *Salle des Menus* about six o'clock.

At four o'clock the vanguard of the rioters had reached Versailles. At first a few only of the women were admitted to the bar of the Assembly to state their demands—bread and the punishment of those who had

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insulted the nation. Soon a squalid crowd, rain-drenched and muddy, forced its way not only into the galleries but even into the body of the hall, where they occupied the benches of the members. As they said they were starving, Mounier was weak enough to order bread to be given to them. Drink of every kind was also freely distributed. A scene of drunken disorder followed, disgusting to all but those who were delighted with anything which might bring the Assembly into contempt. Some of the noble members of the Right even encouraged the indecent behaviour of the women. Barrel Mirabeau was seen toying and laughing with those among them who were least repulsive in appearance.

In the evening, after the arrival of Lafayette and his National Guards, Mirabeau proposed that the Assembly should adjourn. This has been looked upon as a proof that he was an accomplice in a plot against the safety, or at all events the liberty, of the royal family; but, if Lafayette and his armed thousands could not or would not protect them, what could be done by the weary and distracted deputies howled at by the mob in the galleries and crowded from their benches by drunken prostitutes? Mirabeau, their dear little mother Mirabeau, had been cheered by this rabble, even when he had called them to order and protested against their presence, but he may well have thought that the Assembly had submitted long enough to such humiliation.

Early on the morning of the 6th Mirabeau was in the Assembly, when a message came from the king inviting the representatives of his people to the palace. He had already promised Lafayette and the crowd that

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he would go to Paris. Mounier saw nothing but disloyalty in the motion carried by Mirabeau, that a deputation of thirty members, and not the whole body, should obey the king's summons to assist him with their advice. Yet it is clear that, after Lewis XVI. had capitulated, the presence of the whole Assembly in the palace would have been of no real service, and might have exposed him and them to further humiliation. Lafayette and his National Guard were firmly determined that the king should return with them. The next resolution moved by Mirabeau and carried without discussion, that the Assembly was inseparable from the king, may be explained in the light of the earnest appeal he made next day to La Marck to do his utmost to persuade the king and queen to escape from Paris. If the king could reach Blois or Rouen in safety, it would clearly be well that the Assembly should be bound to follow him by their own solemn vote.

It is perhaps less easy to reconcile the account of the events of October 5 and 6 given in the *Courrier de Provence* with perfect loyalty on the part of Mirabeau. The excesses of the mob are palliated, passed over in silence, or excused by the provocation received and by the fear the people felt of plots formed to deprive them of the benefits of the Revolution. But Mirabeau may have been aware that Mounier and his friends, who at this time seceded from the Assembly, intended by dwelling on the violence done to the king to endeavour to raise the provinces against Paris; and he may have judged that a time when the king and the royal family were in the hands of the revolutionists was ill chosen

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for beginning civil war. If so, he acted in perfect accordance with the hope expressed by Marie Antoinette on October 10 to the Austrian ambassador, that the members who had left the Assembly would endeavour to calm the provinces, instead of using recent events to excite their indignation, since everything was preferable to the horrors of civil war.

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CHAPTER VIII

Mirabeau's first advice to the Court—Negotiations with Lafayette —He fails to prevent the exclusion of Ministers from the Assembly.

NOTWITHSTANDING the open purse of La Marck, Mirabeau's pecuniary embarrassments continued. He had inherited from his father nothing but litigation, yet it would be unjust to suppose that sordid motives were the sole or even the chief cause of his anxiety for place. Had money been his only object he might easily have found those who would have bought him at his own price. He did not in his correspondence with La Marck affect disinterestedness, he did not pretend that a good salary was a matter of indifference; but his ambition, it would be charitable to add his patriotism, had other aims—to restore the necessary authority of the Crown, to establish firmly the liberty which had been won, but which as yet was ill secured, threatened as it was by anarchy and by the reaction which anarchy might provoke. More and more he must have realised that, though powerful to destroy, he was, unless he could control the Government and influence the policy of the Court, powerless to preserve or to create, powerless in short to affect the result.

He devoted all his energies to preparing the way

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for the formation of a ministry in which he and other members of the Assembly might find place. Bearing in mind that this was the object at which he aimed, it is worth while to examine with some care his policy during the month which followed the day when, according to the virtuous Bailly, "the humane, respectful, and loyal people of Paris reconquered their king," a phrase which in its foolish or cowardly adulation of a venal rabble was in the mouth of the chief magistrate of the capital more ominous than the horrors of the previous night, or than the atrocious procession which accompanied the royal captives from Versailles.

To attain his end, the formation of a government strong enough to direct and control the Revolution with the support of the moderate majority in the Assembly, it was necessary that Mirabeau should convince the Court that he was both able and willing to be of service, that he should secure the co-operation of Lafayette, at that time undoubtedly the most powerful man in France, and above all that he should obtain the admission of ministers to the legislature.

According to La Marck, on the day after Lewis XVI. had been conducted to the Tuileries, Mirabeau urged him, if he had any influence with the king and queen, to persuade them that both France and they were undone if they remained in Paris. "I am busy," he continued, "devising a plan to enable them to escape: could you convey to them the assurance that they can count upon me?" "I told him," says La Marck, "to prepare his plan. When it was completed I would find some means of placing it in their hands." A few days afterwards Mirabeau brought to him the first of those admir-

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able state papers written for the Court, which have been preserved for posterity by the care of his friend. After his rebuff at the end of September, La Marck did not dare to approach the queen directly, but he obtained a secret interview with the Count of Provence, in the hope that he would appreciate the wisdom of Mirabeau's advice and be able to remove the prejudices which prevented Marie Antoinette and his brother from accepting the hand stretched out to save them.

Mirabeau's note was thoroughly consistent with the principles he had professed both in public and private as the irreconcilable enemy of the old order, yet at the same time a convinced royalist. He began by pointing out that the position of the king and of the Assembly in Paris was not sufficiently independent. The enemies of the Revolution might plausibly refuse to obey their decrees on the ground that they were not free agents. The situation of the royal family was extremely precarious. Bankruptcy was imminent, famine might come with the winter. In three months Paris, in the power of a frenzied and irresistible mob, might be the scene of horrors. "To-day we are only weary and discouraged, it is the moment of our despair which is to be feared." The strength of a government depends upon the hold it has on public opinion and on the control of the revenues of the country. The ministry was despised, the revenues practically non-existent, the Assembly was sinking lower and lower in public estimation.

The king must leave Paris, but he must not go to Metz or to any place on the frontiers, he must not appear to be flying from his people in the hope of re-establishing his authority by the assistance of foreigners.

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Still less must he ally himself with the nobles, and by preferring the interests of a few individuals to those of the nation unite the whole country against himself, and provoke a civil war on the most unequal terms. Neither should he place himself in open opposition to the Assembly and appeal against it to the country: this policy also could only end in civil war.

The Revolution in itself was not only salutary but necessary. By it the people had recovered rights which should be firmly secured to them. Many of the laws passed by the Assembly must be accepted. There was no safety either for the monarch or the State except in the closest union between the prince and his people. Means must be found—he indicated what they might be —to enable the king to leave Paris and betake himself to Rouen. He should then issue a proclamation pointing out that he had been a captive in Paris, that the ill-disposed might disregard the decrees of the Assembly, on the pretext that they had not been freely sanctioned by him; that he had now come to Rouen to throw himself into the arms of his people; that it was his intention to invite the Assembly to join him, and afterwards to summon a new convention to complete, ratify, and, where it seemed desirable, amend the result of their labours; that, above all, he was anxious to maintain the national credit; that he was determined no longer to be satisfied with economies which existed only on paper, and would himself set an example of thrift by living like a private gentleman, without the trappings of royalty, on an income of 1,000,000 livres.

La Marck spent two midnight hours at the Luxembourg endeavouring to persuade Monsieur that Mirabeau

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had not belonged to the Orleanist faction, that he had had no part in the events which had left Lewis XVI. the prisoner of Lafayette and of the municipality of Paris. The Count of Provence took Mirabeau's note, read it with judicious criticisms, and on the whole with approval. But, he said, there was no hope of inducing the king to adopt that, or any other decided policy. His weakness and indecision were beyond all words, his resolutions had as little coherence as a pile of oiled billiard-balls. Nor had the queen as much influence over him as was supposed. "I came away," says La Marck, "with a sad heart, convinced that decision and firmness were not to be found in a quarter where they were indispensable." Monsieur might sneer at the king, to whom he was far superior in ability, but he was himself scarcely more capable of decision and energetic action. The weakness of the elder brother was in the main intellectual. He had many estimable moral qualities. His diffidence led him to distrust his own judgment, experience had taught him to distrust the advice of others, and his character was of that sluggish and passive type to which endurance is easier than action. Yet he was well-meaning, humane, and honest. When convinced of his duty he was not afraid to stake his life upon what he held to be the truth. The resolution of a martyr underlay his dull inertness. The younger brother on the other hand was weak because, although his parts were respectable, he was wanting both in honesty and courage. His epicurean cynicism was incapable of a manly resolution.

While La Marck was attempting to gain the ear of the Court, Mirabeau endeavoured to come to an under-

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standing with Lafayette, and in this also he was loyally supported by his friend. Early in October, while the Assembly was still at Versailles, an interview took place between the Triumvirate, as A. Lameth, Barnave, and Duport, at that time the leaders of the radical party, began to be called, Lafayette, and Mirabeau at the house of Madame d'Aragon, a niece of the latter. It was agreed that the ministry was incapable, that the executive ought to be strengthened and composed of men who by their conduct in the Assembly had proved that they were friends to the Revolution. It was proposed that Lafayette should be commander-in-chief of the army with a seat in the Council, but nothing seems to have been said of the place of Mirabeau in the Government. He does not appear to have been at any pains to make a favourable impression on Lafayette. He may have been provoked by the punctilious propriety of the general to exaggerate his usual recklessness of statement. He boasted that when electioneering in Provence he had sent a bravo to dog the steps of an agent he distrusted. He said that in politics the rules of everyday morality must yield to higher considerations. When Lafayette begged him to be more measured in his attacks on Marie Antoinette he replied: "Very well, let her live, since you wish it. A queen who has been taught her place may be useful. A murdered queen would be useless, except as a subject for one of poor Guibert's bad tragedies." When Cromwell-Grandison, as Mirabeau called the general, who was more Grandison than Cromwell, left the house, his flesh must have crept at the mere thought of such a confederate; moreover, although he did not altogether reject the proferred alliance,

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he still deemed Necker indispensable, and thought that the time was not yet come to turn out the ministry. He offered his good services to effect a reconciliation between Necker, Montmorin, and Mirabeau. The latter was so anxious to act with Lafayette that he did not refuse these overtures: and a few days later he had an interview with the two ministers. Necker, although no longer supercilious, openly said that his unsullied reputation, the true source of his influence, would not allow him to be a member of a ministry in which Mirabeau held office. However indignant with "the despicable charlatan, who had brought France and the Monarchy within an inch of ruin, which he would rather see consummated than confess his incapacity even to himself," Mirabeau restrained his anger. The offer of an embassy, which, he tells us, he refused, proved that the ministry regarded him as an enemy whom it would be well to remove, rather than as a possible ally. He accordingly tried to persuade the commander of the National Guards to throw his influence into the scale against them, and to promote the formation of a strong ministry composed of men who would not cease to be the representatives of the people when they became the servants of the Crown.

If smooth words could avail, these should not be wanting. On October 19, at the first meeting of the Assembly in Paris, Mirabeau proposed a vote of thanks to Bailly and Lafayette. On the same day he wrote to the latter: "Whatever the issue may be I shall be yours to the end; because I have been so attracted by your great qualities, and because I feel the impossibility of ceasing to be interested in a career so

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splendid and so closely connected with a movement which has given liberty to France." Lafayette replied: "Mutual confidence and friendship, that is what I give and expect." Before many days had passed Mirabeau was complaining to La Marck of Lafayette's fatal indecision, and that, although the ministry treated the commander of the National Guards, the virtual master of Paris, with little consideration, even the "animalcule" Montmorin behaving to him as to a subordinate, he could not be induced to take any decided part against them. Lafayette, in his memoirs, says that, while admiring his sublime talents and enjoying his conversation, he was shocked by Mirabeau's want of principle. This, no doubt, is how he put the matter to himself, and all the more so because some of his friends, as, for instance, the American Morris, begged him not to let his immaculate purity be sullied by contact with so much vice. Yet it is clear that he shrank instinctively from a partnership in which the genius and, still more, the superior energy of his associate's character would have compelled him to play a subordinate part. On the day of the decisive struggle he left his ally without any effective support.

In the middle of September Mirabeau had begun to point out in the *Courrier de Provence* the obvious advantages attending the presence of the ministers in the Assembly. He did not now disdain to appeal to the example of a country "which our former servitude envied, our present folly despises." The lessons of experience in England, he said, are better worth the attention of thoughtful men than the sublime theories of philosophers. From them it can be learnt that the close

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interchange of ideas between the ministers and the legislature, as it exists in the British Parliament, is not only just and useful, but even necessary and unobjectionable. The eagerness to introduce reforms, the impatience of half-measures and anomalies prevalent in France, should be tempered by more regard to ulterior consequences and practical difficulties, and these can only be properly discerned and explained by men experienced in public affairs and taking part in the actual work of administration.

On October 27 Pétion proposed that ministers should be declared ineligible as representatives. Although the proposal was obviously regarded with favour by the Assembly, Mirabeau succeeded in obtaining an adjournment of the question until the larger principle involved was decided.

It is by no means clear what the motives were which determined him to put all his fortunes to the touch on November 6, by proposing that ministers should henceforth be invited to attend the meetings of the Assembly. Not one of the conditions which might have made success reasonably certain or even probable had been secured. The Count of Mercy-Argenteau, on the whole the most trusted adviser of Marie Antoinette, was disposed to think that the Court could not do better than make use of Mirabeau. The queen, in a letter written on October 28, allows the possibility "that the king may be obliged to admit to his council people whom——." The unfinished sentence is suggestive of much, but there is no proof that Mirabeau had obtained the adhesion of any of the persons concerned to such a ministerial arrangement as was found in his writing

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among the papers in the possession of the Count of La Marck. Necker, nominally Prime Minister, because the king ought not to be deprived of the advantage of his popularity, the Archbishop of Bordeaux (Champion de Cicé) to have the Seals, Talleyrand the Treasury, the Duke of Liancourt the War Office, since he was an honourable man of decided character and personally attached to the king, La Marck the Navy, Target to be Mayor of Paris, Lafayette Marshal of France and generalissimo, Mirabeau in the Council without a department.

Necker was still determined that he would not be Mirabeau's colleague. Cicé, a shifty intriguer who had been at first disposed to join in the campaign against the virtuous banker, realising perhaps how unimportant he would be in a ministry which included Mirabeau, had now turned against him. Lafayette had indeed promised his support, but he regarded, or affected to regard, the question of the admission of ministers to the Assembly with indifference. In any case it appeared hopeless to attempt to overcome his indecision. He might not—Mirabeau wrote to La Marck—break his word, but he would never be ready to do what he had promised at the decisive moment. It is probable that Mirabeau determined to venture his great stroke because, however unfavourable the chances might be, there was little hope that they would improve. On November 5 he carried what was virtually a vote of censure on the ministry, for neglecting to promulgate and enforce the decrees of the Assembly in the provinces, but on the same day he learnt that a formidable coalition was being formed against him.

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On the next day he opened the decisive battle by a tactical manœuvre, as he called it. He had felt the ground by remarking in a speech on the day before that, so long as the legislature and the executive were opposed to each other instead of being closely united, it would be impossible to restore vigour to the Government. He now began by dealing with subjects apparently little connected with what he had most at heart—the food supply of the capital, the inconvenience and danger caused by the hoarding or exportation of the currency. It was only at the end of his speech that he took occasion to deplore the want of a good understanding between the ministry and the Assembly as an obstacle to all energetic action on the part of the authorities. He begged his audience to allow him for a moment to direct their attention to England. Perhaps they might hope to frame a more perfect constitution than that of Great Britain, but they could not hope to devise one more generally popular. Never since the English Parliament existed had it been proposed to exclude from it the ministers of the Crown. He then, with admirable lucidity, pointed out the advantages arising from the presence of the heads of the administration in the legislature. It is difficult to understand how any men, however besotted by theory and prejudice, could have been blind to what was so obvious; and on this day it seemed not impossible that Mirabeau might carry the motion with which he concluded: "that the ministers of the Crown should henceforth be invited to attend the meetings of the Assembly." He was supported by the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre, the Dukes of Aiguillon and La Rochefoucauld, by Garat and other constitutional

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monarchists. The Left were apparently unprepared to discuss the question, and only obtained an adjournment of the debate by a narrow majority. On the next day the temper of the House had completely changed. The attack on Mirabeau was begun by Montlosier, a member of the Right, who maintained that ministers might often be bad citizens chosen by the Government to mislead the representatives of the people. Lanjuinais, who spoke next, a radical, but on this occasion the tool of the Archbishop of Bordeaux, exclaimed, "You are dominated and carried away by the eloquence of a man of genius! What would he not be able to effect were he minister!" and he concluded by proposing "that the representatives of the nation should be declared incapable of receiving place, pension, or favour of any kind from the executive power during the session of the legislature to which they had been elected, and for three years following." Scarcely had Lanjuinais sat down when a deputy named Blin proposed as an amendment "that henceforth no member of the Assembly might accept office." Upon this there was applause from all sides, and loud cries of "Divide." Whatever chance of success Mirabeau may have had on the previous day, it was clear that the general feeling of the Assembly was now hostile to him. It must not be forgotten that he never led a "party," he had no followers on whom he could reckon; the only votes he commanded were those of the members whom he persuaded by his arguments or fascinated by his eloquence. Common sense, the logic and the earnestness of the orator had told on November 6: during the night intrigue, prejudice, fanaticism, suspicion, and envy had been able to reassert their authority.

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The Right dreaded the formation of a strong and liberal ministry which might consolidate and perpetuate the conquests of the Revolution. The factious and all who saw their advantage in the weakness of the Government and the continuation of anarchy were not less opposed to whatever might give vigour to the executive. Some honest radicals were doubtless influenced by the rumours spread in Paris that the Court was seeking to bribe the representatives of the people, others could not contemplate with equanimity the proposed violation of the sacred principle of the separation of the three powers. Whatever votes the ministry could influence were employed to prevent anything that might facilitate Mirabeau's accession to power; and Necker still had friends among the constitutional monarchists, the admirers of English institutions, the very men who would otherwise have been most disposed to welcome the idea of a parliamentary Cabinet. And lastly, not a few men agreed with Mirabeau's conclusions, but voted against him from profound distrust of his motives, and because they believed him to be pleading the cause of his own ambition. Deserted by Lafayette, Mirabeau stood practically alone against all these opponents. Before Blin sat down he must have known that all was lost. He had ventured to hope that the day at length had dawned when he would be able to make a worthy use of his great gifts. And now that this hope was crushed, what rage, what despair must have filled his heart! Rage at the perverse folly of the slaves of phrases which they miscalled principles, at the suicidal infatuation of the Right, at the thought of his own past which prevented

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him from winning the perfect confidence of any section of his colleagues: despair that an opportunity which might never recur had slipped from his grasp. Event so pressed on event, the dissolution of the State advanced with such giant strides, that what could be done to-day might be impossible to-morrow. Even if at the eleventh hour the king should place himself in his hands, could he hope to save the Monarchy by the mere force of his genius, after the executive had been disarmed and paralysed, after the last vestiges of subordination had vanished from the army, the last loyal prejudice from the hearts of the people?

Never, perhaps, was Mirabeau greater than at this moment. The blow which shattered his ambition neither shook his firmness nor deprived him of the entire possession of his faculties. He once more ascended the tribune, and with admirable readiness and self-control again pleaded a cause which, as the sarcastic irony of his conclusion shows, he well knew to be hopeless. It could not be, he said, that the member who brought forward such a motion wished to imply that a good minister was not to be found among the chosen men of the nation. Nor could he mean that because a citizen had been able to win the confidence of the people he therefore must necessarily be unworthy of the confidence of the monarch. After the Assembly had solemnly declared all citizens equally eligible to all employments and offices, were they to except from this equality those twelve hundred deputies who had been honoured by the suffrages of a great people? or was the mover convinced that the ministry and the Assembly ought to be so divided and opposed to each other that

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every measure likely to establish a closer connection, greater harmony and unity between them ought to be avoided? . . . or was it thought that the king in the selection of his ministers ought to prefer his courtiers or those perhaps who had vainly sought the suffrages of the electors to the chosen representatives of his people? If the minister in whom the nation had placed all its hopes, who had been recalled to power by an almost unanimous outburst of popular feeling, had sat among them, was it maintained that this should have incapacitated him from accepting office? He could not believe it, for he could not bring himself to believe that which was palpably absurd. Clearly then the intention of the mover must be something different. It might perhaps be expedient to prevent some individual member from becoming minister. But great principles ought not to be sacrificed to obtain a particular end. He would therefore propose as an amendment that the members of the Assembly whom the mover must have in view should be excluded from the ministry. These could only be two. The other representatives had given too many proofs of independence, courage, and public spirit for it to be possible to suppose that they could be the object of his apprehensions. "But there are," so he ended, "two representatives about whom he and I may speak our minds more freely—and certainly it would seem that his motion must be aimed at one or the other of these two. You must already, gentlemen, have guessed who these are—the mover himself and I. I mention him, because it is possible that his diffident modesty or irresolute courage fears that some great mark of confidence may be thrust upon him, and that

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he trusts to secure a pretext for refusing it by this general disability. And next I say myself, because certain rumours which have been spread about me may have excited the hopes of some and the fears of others, and it is possible that the mover may have believed these reports and that his estimate of me may be the same as my own; in which case I am not surprised that he should think me little fitted to discharge the duties of an office which is indeed far above, not my zeal or my courage, but my talents and my attainments: especially if I am to be deprived of the instruction and the counsels which I have ever received in this Assembly.

"This then, gentlemen, is the amendment I beg leave to move—that the proposed incapacity to hold office should apply only to M. de Mirabeau, member for the Commons of Aix."

Mirabeau was listened to with impatience and sat down amid groans. The motion that henceforth none of the members of the Assembly might accept office under the Crown was carried by a large majority.

There was no more fatal day than this in the annals of the French Monarchy, if it prevented the formation of a ministry composed of the leading members of the Assembly and including Mirabeau. The plan proposed by him to the Count of Provence was open to obvious objections. If the first part of it was successfully carried out, would the king and queen, surrounded at Rouen by the Swiss and other loyal troops, have been able to resist the temptation of struggling against innovations which they detested? Would they have followed the advice of the man whom they regarded as a dangerous

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enemy, and not rather have listened to the advice of their courtiers and friends? Had Mirabeau, on the other hand, become the virtual prime minister in a parliamentary cabinet, there is no doubt that he would at once have attempted to form a strong party composed of all the moderate men in the Assembly. He would have used the legislature to coerce the Court, and the influence which the king still possessed to guide the legislature. The delight which the people of Paris showed at the presence among them of the royal family, the recognition by the most violent and fanatical demagogues of the fact that the populace was not yet ripe for republican institutions, the undoubted loyalty of the provincial visitors at the festival of July 14 nearly a year later, a hundred other indications prove that the traditional devotion of the French people to the Crown, as the centre and symbol of national life, was not extinct, and might have proved a powerful instrument in the hands of a skilful politician, if the king could have been induced to adopt a line of conduct so decided as to convince his subjects that he was no enemy to the Revolution.

The treasury was empty, the army mutinous, the fears and the hopes of the populace were alike extravagant. Yet the miseries and crimes which were impending might have been averted had the legislature and the executive agreed to co-operate vigorously in the repression of anarchy. The execution of the murderers of the baker François, the increased vigour of the municipality and the National Guard in checking disorder, the passing of a riot act, had greatly improved the state of things in Paris, notwithstanding the

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presence of innumerable vagrants and criminals, the want of employment, the scarcity of food, and the efforts of the factious on both sides to stir up trouble and to excite alarms.

In the provinces the urban authorities and militia had in most districts checked further outrages, and for the complete restoration of order it was only necessary that the country people should be convinced that, while feudalism had for ever fallen, the rights of property, the obligations of contract, and the just demands of the Government would be rigidly enforced. But there was no room for hope so long as the executive authority was in the hands of a ministry which remained totally inactive,—shamming dead, said their enemies, in order that bankruptcy, riot, and anarchy might discredit the Revolution; paralysed, retorted their friends, by the usurpations and mischievous meddling of the Assembly.

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CHAPTER IX

Policy of the Constituent—Mirabeau's treaty with the Court—His advice to the King and Queen.

HOWEVER bitter his disappointment, Mirabeau's sanguine disposition, his confidence in the resources of his genius, did not long permit him to despair. Disgust with the Assembly, which was, he said, as ill-conditioned and as hard to guide as an obstinate ass, did not prevent him from continuing to be regular in attendance and assiduous in debate. The attention of the Constituent was occupied by important matters during the later months of 1789 and the beginning of 1790. Among these were the administrative reorganisation and division of the kingdom, the suppression of the old and the establishment of an entirely new judicial system, and the attempt to close the yawning gulf of bankruptcy by casting into it the property of the Church. In the discussion of all these questions Mirabeau played a prominent part. Yet it does not appear that the policy of the legislature was much influenced either by his eloquence or his wisdom. He was listened to and applauded when he flattered the prejudices of the day and advocated foregone conclusions; he was heard with impatience and his warnings were disregarded when he suggested amendments likely to palliate the evils which

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his practical insight would not permit him to ignore. Always, he complained to La Marck, confined to the part of adviser, never in a position to act, his destiny was that of Cassandra—to be ever prophesying the truth and never to be believed.

Sieyès originated the new and uniform division of the kingdom into departments, districts, and municipalities. Talleyrand first suggested that the Assembly might find in the property of the Church the means of avoiding bankruptcy and of tiding over the financial difficulties. Nor had Mirabeau the initiative in financial questions, with which rightly or wrongly he was believed to be specially conversant. When, on November 14, Necker announced to the Assembly the absolute necessity of raising 170,000,000 livres to meet the deficit, and proposed the conversion of the *Caisse d'Escompte* into a national bank and the issue of a paper currency of 240,000,000 livres, the really admirable speech, drafted by Clavière, in which he criticised and condemned this scheme, did not, although applauded, prevent the partial acceptance of the minister's proposals.

On December 19 the Assembly adopted the recommendations of their finance committee: that certain concessions should be made to the *Caisse d'Escompte*, which was in return to advance 80,000,000 livres to the State, that Church property and domain lands to the value of 400,000,000 livres should be sold in the course of four years and assignats to that amount issued, which should be preferentially received by the State as the purchase money, and thus gradually withdrawn from circulation.

Although the issue of assignats was suggested by his friend Clavière, Mirabeau wholly condemned the policy

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of the Assembly. He believed that the committee was but the mouthpiece of the minister "who was climbing the pinnacle of fame supported by the double crutch of famine and paper money." What had been done could, he maintained, only delay the catastrophe for a few weeks, and he profoundly disapproved of an inconvertible paper currency under the disguise of assignats.

Everything at this time inclined him to despondency. His health was undermined by attacks of the numerous and distressing ailments to which his iron constitution eventually succumbed. A year of the life he led would have been mortal to most men. He was not content with burning the candle at both ends, he threw it into the flames. "You must be a salamander," said Dumont, "to be able to live in such a devouring furnace." Nights of dissipation did not prevent him from beginning before seven o'clock the unintermitted activity of his day.

When every allowance has been made for the assistance he obtained from his *atelier*—and to be able so completely to direct and absorb the energies of others implies no small expenditure of vital force—we must still marvel at the amount of work he accomplished. He was unequalled, said an acute observer, in the art of talking about what he did not understand. He boasted that by an hour's conversation with an expert he could obtain more information on any subject than others would acquire by days of study. Yet he could not have spoken so often and at such length on the most various topics without laborious preparation. His public correspondence was most extensive, and he found time to write elaborate letters discussing, explaining, defending his policy to his uncle, to Mauvillon and other private

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friends; to La Marck he often sent several notes on the same day. At a later period he composed day by day the elaborate memoranda for the Court of which a part are published in the two volumes of M. de Bacourt, and during the last months of his life he was practically foreign minister. He kept open house for politicians whom he wished to influence and for his admirers from the provinces, and he sent his visitors away marvelling at the exuberant vigour of his conversation, and this while he was suffering from diseases sufficient to have reduced most men to the listless inactivity of a sick-room. Even if the hæmorrhages, the nephritic colics, ophthalmias, and other maladies of Vincennes were exaggerated, if not invented, to excite the sympathy of the authorities and the pity of his father, his later ailments were certainly authentic. Besides symptoms of organic disease, he had repeated attacks of serious illness: an enteric fever in February 1789, a jaundice in the following summer, which was neglected and from which he never wholly recovered, constantly recurring and most painful inflammation of the eyes. More than once he appeared in the Assembly with his face bandaged and still bleeding from the bites of leeches.

It is not strange that he should have been despondent. On December 23 he wrote to La Marck that everything was being defiled, corrupted, and dissolved by the miasma of indecision and weakness, of ill-will and dishonesty. "How weary and tired I am!" he exclaimed, yet he clung to the hope that sooner or later he might find himself in power: and if so all might still be well. "The Monarchy," he wrote to Mauvillon, "is imperilled rather by lack of government than by conspiracies. If

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no pilot is found, it is likely enough that the vessel may drive on to the rocks: but if, in spite of prejudice and jealousy, a man of capacity were called to the helm, you can have little idea how easy it would be to steer into deep water."

But by what means could those in command be induced to signal to the one competent pilot? He despaired of Lafayette. He would otherwise have been less outspoken in the letter which he wrote to him on December 1. "We live in a time of great events but little men. I am less than ever able to discover any one with whom I should care closely to associate myself. . . . I have always told you that the giddiness of your elevation and your fatal indecision in what concerns yourself blind you to the impossibility of perpetuating a state of things only to be justified by success. . . . Your liking for mediocrities, and your weakness when your inclinations are concerned, will cause a career, which might have been brilliant, to end in failure, and endanger the Commonwealth by your ruin."

There was more hope of reaching the Court through the Count of Provence, especially since Mirabeau had had an opportunity of doing him a vital service. On the night of December 24 the Marquis of Favras, formerly an officer in the guards of Monsieur, was arrested. A wild report spread of a conspiracy, approved by the king's brother, to raise 30,000 men, to assassinate Bailly and Lafayette, and to starve out Paris. Favras, although a man of broken fortunes, who might, not altogether unjustly, be described as an adventurer, was courageous and loyal. He had doubtless been scheming to release the king and queen, and it is certain that his

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intentions were known to his former master. The alarm therefore of that pusillanimous prince was extreme, and Mirabeau among others was consulted as to the best way of meeting the danger.

He suggested, or approved of the suggestion, that Monsieur should present himself before the municipal authorities and disclaim all complicity with Favras, and he composed for him a grandiloquent phrase exalting the advantages conferred by the Revolution on prince and people alike, since the royal power was the bulwark of liberty, and the liberty of the people the surest foundation of the Monarchy. The municipality was flattered that the king's brother should pay such a tribute to their authority, and Bailly hailed the prince as the founder of political equality.

Mirabeau would have had the Count of Provence use the popularity thus gained to force his way into power. He wrote a paper for him, in which, after showing that the interests of the king and of the nation were identical, and that moderate men of all parties would rally round the throne as soon as they were convinced that the Government honestly meant to check both anarchy and reaction, the Count was to ask his brother to place him at the head of a ministry pledged to carry out such a policy. Monsieur's courage failed when the time came to place the paper in the king's hands. He was aware that he was neither liked nor trusted at Court. "He has," wrote Mirabeau, "the timidity as well as the innocence of a child." "Innocence" was surely superfluous in a confidential letter.

By the end of January he was convinced that nothing was to be hoped from the Count of Provence.

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His forecast of the future became more and more gloomy. Financial ruin would soon be completed by an issue of paper money which would drive the last crown out of circulation. On the other hand he feared a counter-revolution to be attempted either by open violence or by intrigue. If the Assembly was dissolved, it would be found that it had not done its work well enough to secure the Revolution. It was a game of blindman's-buff. Never had such contemptible actors attempted to play so mighty a drama on so vast a stage,—"what blind groping, what pusillanimous acquiescence on the part of the Court, what a grotesque mixture of old ideas and new projects, of petty repugnances and childish longings, of willing and nilling (*de volontés et de nolontés*), of abortive likes and dislikes! . . . But the lowest depth of all is Monsieur."

Partly, perhaps, because he felt himself slighted, partly because, since he could find no sure ally in any other quarter, he wished to secure the favour of the populace, partly because those of his friends and assistants who most counselled moderation were absent, La Marck in Belgium, Dumont in England, Duroveray in Switzerland, Mirabeau's speeches during the first months of 1790 were more than usually violent. Yet it would be difficult to point out anything which he said or did not to be reconciled with his avowed principles. It may seem little in harmony with his reiterated advice to strengthen the executive and secure the authority of the Crown, that he should have opposed a proposal to confer extraordinary powers on the king for the suppression of disorder, and should have controverted Maury, who maintained that by depriving the king of all part in

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judicial appointments the Assembly was organising the law-courts on a republican model. But it was scarcely to be expected that Mirabeau would support a measure intended to strengthen the hands of a minister whom he believed to be not less fatal to France than hostile to himself; while as regards the appointment of the judges he contents himself in his speech with a verbal triumph over Maury, and is careful to express no opinion whatever on the merits of the question. He ended, indeed, with the remarkable and enigmatic words: "I have not taken part in the previous debate, partly because I mistrust my judgment, partly because I have formed other views on this subject, suitable to other seasons and circumstances."

In the spring of 1790 anarchy and violence, which for a time had abated, were more than ever rampant in the provinces. The extreme party was more violent and more influential in the Assembly. The Count of Mercy urged the king and queen to have recourse to Mirabeau. La Marck was summoned from Belgium to conduct the negotiations with his friend. Everything was to be secret. The ministers were to know nothing of the treaty between the Court and their enemy. A private interview convinced Mercy that the orator had both the power and the will to serve the king. La Marck's reiterated assurances that his friend had taken no part in the events of October 5 and 6, if they did not remove, at least mitigated the repugnance of Marie Antoinette.

At the request of Lewis XVI. Mirabeau wrote a political confession of faith. He protested that he was a royalist from confidence in the character and sympathy

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with the situation of the king, and yet more because he knew that France could only be saved by restoring the legitimate authority of the Crown. On the other hand he was convinced that any attempt to bring about a counter-revolution would be not less dangerous than criminal. He promised to do his utmost to secure to the king the control of the executive power, and with this object he would constantly communicate his views and advice to the Court and endeavour to influence public opinion by means of agents in the provinces. "I promise the king," he concluded, "loyalty, zeal, activity, energy, and a courage surpassing all that is probably expected of me. I promise everything except success, which one man cannot command, and which it would be rash and criminal presumption for me to warrant, when so terrible a fever undermines the State and endangers the monarch."

This was written on May 10, and a few days later the bargain was completed. The terms were liberal. Mirabeau's debts, to the amount of 200,000 livres were to be paid. He was to receive 6000 livres monthly, and four bills, each to the amount of 250,000 livres, were entrusted to La Marck, to be handed to him at the end of the session, if the king should then be satisfied with his services. Not only Calonnes and Polignacs, political and social adventurers, even men of honour, such as Marshal Ségur, permitted the king to pay their debts and accepted his pensions, whether secret or not, without any sense of degradation, but Mirabeau's delight was so open and effusive that the indulgent La Marck was slightly shocked. No doubt the certainty of what appeared unlimited wealth to one who had practised the

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art of living largely on a slender and precarious income, the prospect of satisfying to the full a taste for ostentatious profusion, as well as of escaping from the daily humiliations of insolvency, may account for much of Mirabeau's satisfaction. But it had other and worthier grounds. He could not believe that the Court did not mean to use the instrument for which they paid so high a price.

So far his career had been a failure. Fame indeed was his. His reputation as an orator was established beyond all rivalry. Once and again his eloquence had swayed the Assembly. Whatever might come hereafter, the old order had fallen shattered into fragments which no ingenuity could again build into a lasting fabric; and so long as the memory of this ruin endured the name of Mirabeau must survive. But this was not the immortality to which he aspired. He did not, he said, wish his name to go down to posterity associated only with a great destruction—a destruction, moreover, which was not his work. His influence over the course of events had so far not been great. It was not he who proposed the momentous oath in the Tennis Court, nor was it his reply to Brézé which determined the Commons to continue to sit and deprived the king of the resolution to use force against them. It was not his eloquence but the attitude of Paris which led to the withdrawal of the troops from the neighbourhood of the capital and the abandonment of a policy of repression. Even in matters of finance the Assembly had listened to the supporters of Necker rather than to him, and his greatest oratorical triumph had been won when urging the adoption of the minister's measure. He had not

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originated the sale of the property of the Church, and he had disapproved of the issue of assignats. Too often his audience had applauded the violence of his rhetoric and rejected the moderation of his conclusions. But since he had become the adviser of the Crown he trusted to be able to shape the policy of the Government. His boundless confidence in his personal influence forbade him to doubt that, when once the king was convinced how superior he was to his other advisers, he would become a trusted minister, and this without forfeiting his popularity, for, if Lewis XVI. would be guided by him and frankly accept the Revolution, the servant of the most popular of kings would share with his master the love and gratitude of the nation. And if so, what might he not hope to effect! When he saw the enthusiasm with which Lafayette was greeted on the day of the Federation, the readiness of the people to prostrate themselves before their idol, he said to the friends about him: "If ever I became minister you would do well to stab me on the spot, for in a year you would all be my slaves."

But such hopes were destined to bitter disappointment. His connection with the Court was barren of all result, except the production of those admirable papers which he entrusted on his death-bed to La Marck, as the best materials for the future vindication of his memory. These elaborate notes, of which he wrote on an average two every week, discussing events, suggesting how the difficulties of the day might best be met, or sketching schemes of policy, were, as a French writer observes, little else than one more newspaper, to which the king and queen were the only subscribers. Except in unim-

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portant details, his advice was not followed, for he was never trusted. When in the last few months of his life he to some extent influenced the policy of the Government, it was after he had formed relations with Montmorin, quite independently of the treaty with the Court.

It cannot be maintained that Mirabeau was always consistent in his advice. He vacillates between two alternative policies. The earlier, the more moderate, the wiser of these was to profit by the distaste with which a large part of the Assembly regarded the excesses which they had been led to countenance, so as to form a constitutional majority in the legislature and to govern through it. This would be easy if the support of Lafayette could be secured, and if the repeal of the mischievous decree excluding members from office were to allow the king to place some of the leaders of the Left in power. They would be sobered by the sense of responsibility. They would feel the necessity of strengthening the authority of the Crown if it were placed in their hands. When Lafayette proved irreconcilable, when Mirabeau recognised the impossibility of persuading the Assembly to forget their jealousy and to permit the formation of a parliamentary government, when he saw the rapid disintegration of the whole social structure, he began to suggest measures by which it might be possible to save the Monarchy without or in opposition to the Assembly. He was not over nice in the choice of these means. If the representatives of the nation cannot be made the instruments of a sound policy, they will, he argued, be the most dangerous adversaries of such a policy, and in that case nothing

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must be left undone which may tend to undermine their popularity and authority. Yet he generally advises caution and patience. The Assembly has undertaken a task under which it must succumb. It has devised a constitution with unworkable machinery, of which the faults will be patent as soon as an attempt is made to set it in motion. It has usurped one by one all the functions of the executive, and will therefore incur the odium of all that is left undone or done amiss. It has become the slave of the Parisian rabble and of the demagogues who direct that rabble, and must therefore become an abomination to all orderly citizens and to all the inhabitants of the provinces, who are jealous of the preponderance of the capital. It must in the end be crushed by the discredit of the mistakes it has committed, of the hopes it has failed to realise, of the evils it has caused or has been unable to prevent. In the meantime the friends of the Monarchy should insidiously lure it forward, multiply occasions of offence, and neglect no means of stimulating popular hostility and contempt. It did not apparently occur to him that this was little else than that policy of the Extreme Right the reckless folly of which he had severely and justly condemned. Sometimes he suggests bolder counsels: that the king should leave Paris and summon the Assembly to join him in some town, where the representatives of the nation would no longer be terrorised by the clubs and by the organised mob in the galleries and in the streets. He allowed that it was possible, even probable, that the Assembly might be unwilling or unable to obey the royal summons, and that the result might then be civil war. But, as he wrote to Mauvillon, there were times

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when it appeared to him that civil war was an unavoidable evil: and perhaps not wholly an evil. It would rouse the majority from their lethargy, bring the true leaders of opinion, of parties, of the people to the front. In one of his notes for the Court he says: "Civil war is generally the last and most terrible alternative, yet even it might offer opportunities for securing liberty, the constitution, and the royal authority. What is essential is that the provinces should not give themselves to the king, but that he should place himself in the hands of the provinces"; *i.e.* that he should not lead a mere reactionary movement. Nay, he insisted, even were Lewis XVI. replaced on his throne by the enemies of his people, the old order could not be re-established. Come what might, the great principles of the Revolution must be maintained: and the king should not trust to the help of French reactionists or foreign armies.

Marie Antoinette unfortunately could not see that the Revolution was more than a passing frenzy. The deep irresistible current appeared to her as tumultuous and fickle as the wild waves raised upon the surface by battling winds. She turned a deaf ear to Mirabeau's politic and insistent warnings, as to the mere verbiage of a man whose tongue had acquired the trick of popular talk, and attached importance to that part only of his advice of which the wisdom was most questionable. No doubt also the want of consistency in the policy recommended by Mirabeau, as well as in his public conduct and language, increased the disinclination of the king and queen to trust themselves to his guidance. But La Marck justly pointed out that, so long as no part of his advice was followed, he would not feel that it was

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incumbent on him to be consistent. It is rarely the case that one line of action is so demonstrably the best that a reasonable man may not in deliberation hesitate between it and another; and he who finds that he cannot persuade those whom he advises to take what he considers the best course is surely justified in also suggesting the next best alternative. Nor should it be forgotten that Mirabeau was, as his friend says, very impressionable, at one moment despondent, at another so elated that he was apt to ignore or make light of the most formidable obstacles.

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CHAPTER X

The right of declaring war—The Feast of the Federation—Interview with the King and Queen—Despondency of Mirabeau—He inclines to the Left.

THE treaty between Mirabeau and the Court had scarcely been concluded before he had an opportunity of showing how far he was both able and willing to assist his new allies. English settlers had been ejected by Spanish men-of-war from Nootka Sound, a harbour of Vancouver's Island. It was the familiar question between occupation on the one side, and ownership based on indefeasible but somewhat shadowy rights on the other. The British Government had taken the matter up with spirit, and the Spaniards might reasonably expect that France, closely united as the two countries were by the Family Compact, would at least so far throw her weight into the scale as to enable her ally to negotiate on less unequal terms. Montmorin, the minister of foreign affairs, announced to the Assembly that his master had ordered fourteen ships of the line to be got ready for commission, and asked for the necessary grant of money. In the debate to which this request gave rise, and in spite of the protests of Mirabeau, Alexander Lameth raised the question whether the right of declaring war and concluding peace should henceforth

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be entrusted to the king. That the Government might hope to distract the attention of the people from domestic reforms by foreign war, and to restore the discipline of the army by active service, was indeed a fear less extravagant than many which agitated the Assembly. For four days the debate raged; on the fifth day, May 20, Mirabeau intervened. He was conciliatory, moderate, almost modest. He pointed out that the Assembly possessed in ministerial responsibility and in the absolute control of the purse full security against any misuse by the king of the right of declaring war, yet he attempted to conciliate the prejudices of his audience by allowing that such a prerogative might be dangerous to liberty. He was much more in earnest when he insisted on the danger of leaving the question of peace or war entirely to the legislature. Would an irresponsible Assembly decide more carefully than the monarch and his responsible ministers? Were kings alone the enemies of peace? Is a body of seven hundred men secure from sudden gusts of passion, from contagious emotions? "While one among you is urging deliberation, his voice will be drowned by the shouts of those who are clamouring for war: you will see round you an army of citizens. You may not be deceived by the ministers, but will you never deceive yourselves?" He ended by reading a series of resolutions which divided the right and the responsibility of deciding on war between the king and the legislature, but without explicitly stating whether the formal declaration of war was to be made by the king or the Assembly. He acknowledged that these resolutions were defective, and he took the opportunity to deplore that the great master

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of political science, the founder of the constitution, had not been persuaded to solve the difficult problem—his silence was a public calamity. A politic compliment to conciliate the numerous admirers of Sieyès, whom at other times Mirabeau nicknamed Mahomet, in derision of his self-complacent airs of infallible wisdom.

The intentional ambiguity of Mirabeau's resolutions "leading to constitutional anarchy" was the point chiefly dwelt on by Barnave in an eloquent reply. The legislature, he said, was the natural, the sole exponent of the national will, and, when the nation willed war, a vote of the legislature must be the outward and visible sign of that act of volition. War therefore must be declared by the Assembly after receiving the king's message. Mirabeau listened so far, hastily made a few notes, and exclaiming, "I have heard enough," left the Assembly to enjoy the fresh air and the conversation of Madame de Staël in the Tuileries gardens.

The revolutionists did their utmost to excite popular feeling against the man whom they called, and perhaps believed to be, a venal renegade. That he had been bought by the Court was an old story, so often repeated that now when he had actually become the pensioner of Lewis XVI. it does not seem to have produced much effect. He certainly took no pains to divert suspicion. As Providence had mercifully added a rattle to the tail of the most deadly of snakes, so, said the enemies of Mirabeau, indiscretion had been mercifully joined to those brilliant and vicious parts which might otherwise have been so fatal to his fellow-citizens. Precautions had indeed been taken by the Court to ensure the secrecy of the bargain—the queen's almoner, M. de

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Fontanges, Archbishop of Narbonne, a worthy and discreet man, a member of the Assembly much trusted by the king, had been chosen as the medium of communication. He could find opportunities of seeing Mirabeau and La Marck without attracting attention. But it was soon generally known that money had passed. Desmoulins asked his former associate whether it was true that he had sold himself to the king. Come and dine with me, said Mirabeau, and you shall have your answer. But answer there was none, unless a dinner more choice than those which had all but corrupted Camille's patriotism at Versailles was the answer. La Marck vainly remonstrated with his friend upon the folly of inviting attention to the change in his circumstances by a largely increased expenditure. He moved from his lodgings to a house in the Chaussée d'Antin, moderate in size but furnished within like a lady's boudoir. Here he dispensed lavish hospitality in a dining-room characteristic of his ostentatious want of taste.

On one side was a sideboard laden with costly plate, on another shelves of well-bound books; another was hung with pictures "representing the pleasures of the table"; the fourth was covered with rare engravings. By the side of each guest stood a dumb waiter laden with bottles of wine, plates, glasses, and other requirements. In order that the presence of the servants might not restrain conversation, they only appeared at the end of each course to change the dishes. He bought gems as well as plate. He collected a large library—his best investment, he said—which at his death sold for 140,000 livres. In short, he squandered the ready money he was so little accustomed to possess, for every purpose

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except for that of paying his debts. What is remarkable and characteristic of the time is that this ill-judged extravagance appears to have done Mirabeau little harm. The charge of venality was constantly repeated by his opponents, but they did not brandish it over his head with the spirit and confidence we should have expected, had they felt it to be a really effective weapon. The populace, without stopping to ask whence the money came which paid for it, soon learnt to cheer his blue carriage with as much fervour as the white charger of General Lafayette.

But on May 22, as Mirabeau made his way to the Assembly, hawkers were shouting in the streets a scurrilous pamphlet, "The disclosure of the great Treason of the Count of Mirabeau," and agents of the revolutionary wire-pullers had been active in denouncing him to the mob within and without the House. He was greeted with cries of "To the lantern!" "What, Mirabeau?" said a colleague as he entered; "yesterday the Capitol, to-day the Tarpeian rock!"

Never perhaps were Mirabeau's splendid gifts as a debater more conspicuous than now, when he stood up in the tribune and, facing the jeers of the Right, the howls and execrations of the galleries, and the murmurs of the Left, compelled the attention of his audience by the dignified and measured energy of his language and the cogency of his reasoning. Many of his most admired speeches were written for him by others: he only contributed—though that was much—the tones and gestures, the arts by which a consummate actor can invest a trivial part with importance and pathos, or added here and there some brilliant passage suggested

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by the hint of a friend or by the argument of an adversary, some telling retort provoked by the angry interruptions of his opponents; but on this occasion his speech was not the laboured production of his workshop: the lofty rhetoric, the serried argument were the immediate inspiration of his genius.

Chapelier, a moderate member of the Left, had proposed amendments to the resolutions moved by Mirabeau which emphasised the concurrence of the Assembly in the declaration of war. These he accepted. He began his speech by deploring that charges of treachery and venality should be brought against all who ventured to express moderate opinions, and that the threat of popular vengeance should be the weapon of intolerance. Was it believed to be so impossible that two opinions might be honestly held on a most delicate and difficult constitutional question? "A few days ago," he continued, "the people sought to carry me in triumph, now the 'Great Treason of the Count of Mirabeau' is shouted in the streets. It needed not this lesson to teach me how short the distance is from the Capitol to the Tarpeian rock. But he who fights for reason and for his country is not so easily intimidated. Such blows, aimed at me from below, cannot stop me. To such assailants I reply: first answer me—if you can,—then calumniate me as much as you please." Barnave, he pointed out, had argued as if the constitutional king of the future, acting through responsible ministers, was to be an autocratic despot. Power under any form of government might be abused: if they thought the possible abuse of the royal power outweighed the advantages of a monarchical constitution, let them say "We will

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have no king," but not "We will have an impotent and useless king."

The resolutions proposed by Mirabeau were carried with Chapelier's amendments. Barnave and his friends claimed the victory, for Mirabeau in his first speech had maintained the inadvisability of entrusting the right of declaring peace and war to the legislature, and it had now been enacted that war should be declared by a vote of the Assembly. Yet when we consider all the circumstances, it is plain that Mirabeau was justified in boasting that he had struck a telling blow in defence of the Monarchy. Although he had fallen back from the ground he had first occupied, he had successfully held the key of the position. The resolutions he first proposed would have left the right of declaring peace and war unimpaired in the hands of the executive; they only affirmed the right, which the Assembly already possessed, of refusing supplies and calling the ministers to account. Barnave, on the other hand, would have left it to the Assembly, and to the Assembly alone, to declare peace and war. The decree finally carried conferred the right of declaring war on the Assembly, but only on the initiative of the king and subject to his sanction. The contagion of no sudden frenzy, no passionate and precipitate vote of their representatives, could plunge the nation into war without the co-operation of the executive. The future, it is true, was to show that these checks were practically worthless. But what constitutional clauses would have availed a king bereft of all freedom of action, the prisoner of a terrorised legislature?

Mirabeau boasted that he had formed a constitutional

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party, that he had led reformers and royalists to victory under the standard of limited monarchy. He did not care to acknowledge that he owed his majority to the support of Lafayette, who, on this occasion at least, had spoken out. So long as Mirabeau could control neither the policy of the Court nor the votes of the Assembly, the little finger of the commander of the National Guards was more powerful than the loins of the great orator. Out of doors, in the streets, there were two powers: the National Guard, the disciplined strength of the middle classes, and the army of the Revolution, composed of the very lowest class of the population, reinforced by tramps, criminals, and loafers of every description, attracted to Paris by doles of food and money, and by the prospect of riot, plunder, and impunity. "My head also," the orator boasted, "is a power." Yes, but potential rather than actual.

There is no doubt that Mirabeau was popular. He had his admirers both among the armed citizens of Lafayette and among the rabble who shouted at the heels of St. Huruge or Santerre, as well as among the respectable majority of the middle class who took no part in either exciting or repressing riot. Unfortunately the political fervour of these quiet people rarely sufficed to carry them to the polling-booth, while the private sympathies of the national guardsman and of the proletariat yielded to the orders of their leaders and to the contagious passions of their companions. Mirabeau therefore could as little rely on effective popular support as upon the votes of any party in the Assembly. It was probably because he felt this that on June 1 he again wrote to press his alliance on Lafayette. He

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blames the general for his inaction, for allowing events to take their course at a time when each independent atom of the new system, municipality, district, or department is hurried on in the vortex with a momentum constantly increased by each new event, by the contagion of example, by the mischievous and untiring activity of the most perverse men of the nation. Lafayette's friends were fewer than he supposed; and among those few, although some were men of merit and courage, there was not one who could supply the practical insight, the deeply meditated policy, the inspired genius, the commanding character which the juncture required. Since he, and he alone, possessed these rare and indispensable qualifications, it was not too much for him to ask to play the part of Father Joseph to Lafayette's Richelieu, to be the dictator of the dictator. "Your great qualities," he added with more modesty and less sincerity, "need to be animated by my energy, and my energy requires the support of your great qualities." Lafayette still turned a dèaf ear. Three weeks later (June 20) Mirabeau proposed that the queen, in the presence of the king, who must be tutored and trained beforehand to play his part, should summon the general to accept the co-operation of "the only statesman in the country," of the one man pre-eminent in ability, courage, and strength of character, a man to be won only by the prospect of great dangers to be encountered for the attainment of a great object and a great glory. "We," she must say, "are resolved to trust Mirabeau with the confidence of despair, and we feel that we can only secure his help by placing ourselves unreservedly in his hands." Mirabeau's unabashed self-laudation and the insulting

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assumption that Lewis XVI. was not only incapable of speaking for himself, but needed careful preparation even to enable him to play the part of chorus to his wife's remarks, are equally astounding.

A letter written a few days later by Lewis XVI. to Lafayette in the sense suggested by Mirabeau was found in the celebrated iron cupboard of the Tuileries. This letter was never sent; but Marie Antoinette, in an interview with the general, urged him to act with Mirabeau, of whom she spoke sufficiently well to excite Lafayette's suspicions. He too had shortly before given advice to the Court, and had asked for and obtained from the king a promise of full and undivided confidence. Was he now to share this with Mirabeau? "I have," he said, "overcome the king of England in his might, the king of France in his authority, the people in their fury. I shall not yield to M. de Mirabeau." "Good clap-trap," said Mirabeau, irritated by such sententious vanity, "but he shall pay for it sooner or later." His dislike of Lafayette was still more embittered when the opposition of the commander of the National Guard disappointed his hope of being elected president of the Assembly at the time of the Festival of the Federation (July 14). Lafayette said that, when deputations from every part of the country were assembled to celebrate the birth of liberty, a citizen of untarnished virtue ought to preside over the legislature, and through his influence M. de Bonnai, a popular and respectable member of the Right, was chosen. It is not uncharitable to suppose that it was not the tarnished past of the great orator alone which disqualified him in the eyes of "Cromwell-Grandison."

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The Feast of the Federation was to be Lafayette's great day. But Mirabeau as president of the Assembly, skilled in every art and endowed with every quality to catch the eye and ear of the populace, might invest his own part with so much importance as to eclipse the leading actor.

Mirabeau bitterly lamented that the queen had been unable to prevail on her husband to shake off his sluggish diffidence at the Feast of the Federation. Had Lewis XVI. appeared before the assembled people on horseback at the head of the National Guards, and addressed to them the short and stirring speech composed by his adviser, the triumph of Lafayette would have been turned into a defeat. The undoubted loyalty of the crowd, which cheered even the queen, would have risen to enthusiasm, and the deputations from every part of the country would have returned to their homes to confirm and spread the legend of a liberal and patriotic king. Unquestionably a great opportunity of saving the Monarchy had been missed. It can scarcely be doubted that had the Court resolutely avoided all appearance of reluctance and regret for the past, had the Government shown a little capacity and nerve, the vast majority of Frenchmen would gladly have supported the authorities in an attempt to re-establish order and to close the era of revolution in the summer of 1790. Bouillé in the eastern provinces was able to obtain the assistance of the people and of the National Guards in the suppression of anarchy and military insubordination, because they were convinced that he had honestly accepted changes which he did not pretend to like. The revolutionary fever was abating in the provinces. The Venetian envoy, travelling from Spain

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to Paris, after witnessing as an admiring spectator the Feast of the Federation at Bordeaux, was struck with the cheerful and law-abiding demeanour of the people in Guienne, the Angoumois, Poitou, Touraine, and the Orleannois, everywhere in fact, till he reached the Isle de France and the capital; there discontent and suspicion prevailed, the nobility, he said, were sullen, the middle classes divided by faction, the populace ferocious.

Little more than a week before the ceremony in the Champs de Mars, Mirabeau had a first and last interview with the king and queen at St. Cloud. Marie Antoinette with difficulty overcame the repulsion she felt for the man whose name she could not dissociate from the horrors of the 5th and 6th of October. But the situation fired Mirabeau's imagination. He, who had wept tears of humiliation when the wounds inflicted by the insulting distrust of his colleagues pierced his triple armour of self-complacent pride, brazen assurance, and moral obtuseness, saw himself accepted as the chosen champion of the queen of France, the daughter of Maria Theresa. "Madame," he exclaimed, "the Monarchy is saved." He would sooner die than not perform what he had undertaken. There is no doubt that he was honestly touched by the grace, the dignity, and courage of the queen. The apathetic good-nature of Lewis XVI. did not discourage him, it seemed to promise that the king would be a passive instrument in capable hands. Marie Antoinette also expressed her satisfaction after the interview. Mirabeau was not the monster she had expected, and she believed that he perhaps meant honestly. But she had not the slightest intention of

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placing herself unreservedly in his hands. The frank acceptance of the Revolution, the abandonment for good and all of every scheme for restoring the old order, whether with or without foreign assistance, was insisted upon by him from first to last as the necessary basis of all sound policy. But to this Marie Antoinette would not resign herself, nor could she believe him to be truly her friend who would force her to do so.

We have already remarked that Mirabeau was apt, partly from a certain imaginative optimism, partly from an overweening confidence in his own powers, to overlook or make light of obstacles. But for this disposition he could scarcely have thought of founding the edifice of his hopes and his ambition on a basis so shifting and treacherous as the confidence and co-operation of the Court. He never indeed hoped much from Lewis XVI. In the notes for the Court he laments his blunders, his want of energy and decision. Indeed he is outspoken to a degree which would have offended ears even more accustomed to plain-speaking than those of royalty. It was insulting to the queen, whom he wished to conciliate, to assume as a matter of course that her husband was so poor a thing. But he believed that he could obtain the confidence of Marie Antoinette, and that she possessed the resolution and ability, together with the influence over her husband, which would enable her trusted adviser to save the reformed Monarchy.

There are some characters in history which it is all but impossible to consider impartially; names which excite feelings opposed to dispassionate judgment, not less surely than the rallying cries of contemporary

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party. It is not so much that the evidence is conflicting, as that the facts appeal too strongly to our emotions for us to be able to hold the balance with a perfectly even hand. After every allowance has been made for the natural desire of the opponents of the Revolution to heighten the pathos of an effective legend, the authentic story of the indignities, hardships, and sorrows borne with patient courage and simple dignity by a high-spirited and delicately nurtured princess is sufficient to kindle in us a passionate pity for Marie Antoinette, even were we not already biassed in her favour by the monstrous calumnies of her enemies. Yet neither pity nor indignation should blind us to the fact that if Marie Antoinette was not a combination of Messalina and Catherine de' Medici, she was as little the incarnation of royal dignity, of feminine charm and ethereal virtue which dazzled the fevered vision of Burke, as, to descend from the transcendental heights of panegyric and detraction, she was neither the tool of Austrian intrigue, as so many of her subjects honestly believed, nor yet, as her apologists insist, the patriotic queen, who had no thought but for the safety of her husband and the good of her adopted country.

Adversity was to prove that Marie Antoinette possessed some solid virtues; in her prosperity she could only be said to be not without amiable qualities. She had the sensibility, the feeling heart by which that generation set such store. She was a constant and affectionate friend, and her graceful courtesy and good-nature would have been pleasing even in a private person. But she was thoughtless and self-indulgent, too ready to show her likes and dislikes, too careless in

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the choice of her associates and in her conduct not to lay herself open to misrepresentation. Her tastes were neither refined nor intellectual; not gross perhaps, but frivolous and extravagant. She was far from being a stupid woman, but she came to France a half-educated girl, eager to enjoy herself and impatient of schooling. Her mother had supplied her with a prudent mentor, the Count of Mercy-Argenteau, and she attempted to direct her inexperience by an indefatigable correspondence. But Maria Theresa was, above all, anxious to fashion her daughter into a useful instrument of her policy, and Marie Antoinette was far more disposed to satisfy her mother by supporting Choiseul and the faction at the French Court supposed to be friendly to Austria, than to follow her advice, when obedience implied the sacrifice of her personal pleasures and inclinations. Her influence over her husband, at all events before the Revolution, has been generally exaggerated. She was never able to persuade him to restore office to Choiseul; nor was it her solicitations which led to the fall of Turgot, but rather the conviction of the king that the reforms proposed by that minister amounted to a revolution, of which he disapproved, in the form of government. Lewis XVI. may have resigned himself to the Revolution, as he resigned himself to imprisonment and execution. His honesty, his determination not to appeal to the sword against his subjects, his apathy, might have led him to accept the position of a constitutional ruler, but even uninfluenced by his wife he would constantly have regretted the golden age of autocratic kings surrounded by a privileged yet subservient nobility.

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Yet, in personal matters, the queen's influence was great and almost invariably mischievous. The Count of Mercy, had he chosen, could have given Mirabeau instances of her feminine perversity and capacity for shutting her eyes to what it was convenient to ignore, sufficient to prove the folly of expecting her to become the instrument of a policy she disliked, simply because it was proved to be the only one possible.

Every precaution had been taken to keep the interview between Mirabeau and the royal couple secret. After sleeping at the house of his niece Madame d'Aragon, he was driven to St. Cloud by his nephew Du Saillant, disguised as a postilion. But it was soon generally known that a meeting had taken place, and the great treason of the Count of Mirabeau was again loudly and confidently proclaimed.

The bright hopes which the grace of the queen and the good-natured simplicity of the king had kindled in the orator, were soon dimmed. He wrote on July 17 to La Marck that, unless the Court showed more energy and supplied him with the means of acting, he should sacrifice himself without profiting them. Nothing could be more outspoken than his note of the same date for the king and queen. There was, he complained, no room for hope, so long as all their feelings, their plans and policy, were ruled by private considerations and apprehensions; so long as there was not enough courage to employ or consult a sensible man, or even to struggle out of the toils of traitors; so long as they dared not speak with some little authority and dignity, or dismiss an incompetent ministry, dared not seize the last chance left to the Monarchy and the

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last alternative to civil war. He insisted in the same paper, and in one written a few days later, that it was absolutely necessary that the king should leave Paris for Fontainebleau. But there must be nothing approaching to a secret flight. The sanction and assistance of Lafayette must be openly demanded; he could not refuse it without proclaiming to the provinces that the king was a prisoner in his capital, and the commander of the National Guards of Paris his gaoler.

As the summer of 1790 wore away, Mirabeau became more and more impatient. The king and queen must, he said, make up their minds in one way or another. Let them at least decide consistently to do nothing. Inaction was dangerous enough, but infinitely wiser than to oscillate between feeble resistance and sullen acquiescence.

His hostility to Necker was not disarmed by the diminished influence and waning renown of the once idolised statesman. The opposition of the finance minister to the issue of assignats was one at least of the causes which converted Mirabeau, the previously convinced opponent of inconvertible paper, into an ardent admirer and advocate of this expedient.

It would be a waste of space to reproduce the arguments by which Mirabeau recommended it to the Assembly. To only one of these does he himself appear to have attached any weight. In his note for the Court of September 1 Mirabeau allows that the success of the assignats is uncertain; but, he asks, in what other way was it possible to avoid the most terrible catastrophe? Some expedient must be found to satisfy, at all events for a time, the creditors of the State, and also

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of the Church, for when appropriating the property of the clergy the Assembly had undertaken to discharge their not inconsiderable debt. Moreover, the placemen and others whose offices had been abolished were to receive compensation, and, since the ordinary sources of revenue had entirely failed, money must be obtained to defray the most necessary expenses of administration. Something had to be done, and a drowning man must clutch at what is nearest.

There was also another, a less ostensible reason, which weighed with Mirabeau. He welcomed the opportunity of inflicting a final humiliation on the minister of finance in his own department. Necker, indeed, clung so desperately to office that even this blow might not have sufficed to dislodge him, had not the mob been slipped upon him by the Jacobin wire-pullers, who were disturbed by the success of Bouillé in repressing anarchy at Nanci, and fearful lest his vigour and the good conduct of the National Guards and troops under his command should prove contagious.

Mirabeau probably was glad, by coming forward as the leader of the revolutionary party in a question which excited general interest, yet was less vital than the maintenance of the last vestiges of discipline and authority, to restore a popularity somewhat impaired by the rumours of his understanding with the Court, by his defence of the royal prerogative, and by a proposal he made on August 20, that, to restore discipline, the army should be disbanded and entirely reorganised, as well as by his defence of Bouillé. "More honesty and less cleverness, Mirabeau, or 'ware the lantern," said Fréron in his *Ami du Peuple*. "Erect 800 gallows,"

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wrote Marat, "and let the infamous Riqueti dangle from the first." But all this was forgotten in the rapturous applause with which the Left and the galleries greeted the peroration of his speech in defence of assignats on September 27: "Let us venture to be great, let us understand how to be just. To be legislators we must be both." It was idle after this for Maury to brandish in the tribune, amidst howls and laughter, two of Law's notes "stained with the tears and blood of an earlier generation."

The flight of Necker and the discredit of the Government seemed to necessitate the formation of a new ministry. Lafayette, though still the most influential man in Paris, was not so popular as he had been, nor was the devotion of the National Guards to their commander so enthusiastic. Since the success of Bouillé he was no longer the only man in France who could dispose of an armed and more or less disciplined force. All this was hopeful. If only the king could be persuaded to throw off his lethargy!—but of this Mirabeau began to despair. "I confess," he wrote on September 28, "that I am of very little use . . . for I am refused the means of being useful. I am listened to with more patience than confidence, there is more desire to know what I advise than to follow my advice." Mercy-Argenteau was unfortunately recalled in September. La Marck was ill able to supply his place as Mirabeau's interpreter and advocate at court. Marie Antoinette could not altogether trust so familiar a friend of the revolutionary leader.

In the beginning of October Mirabeau supposed the fall of the ministry to be imminent, and, although prostrated by sickness, he was indefatigable in urging a

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change of policy upon the Court. He pointed out the dangers which threatened the new constitution, dangers which arose partly from external causes, partly from its own inherent defects.

Everything must be done to convince the nation that the king had honestly accepted the Revolution; he must ally himself with the popular party and entrust the administration to the leaders of the Assembly, even to the Jacobins. "A Jacobin minister would no longer be a Jacobin." The wildest demagogue, when placed at the helm and responsible for the safety of the State, would recognise the insufficiency of the power of the executive. But, if the perverse jealousy of the Assembly insisted that ministers should be chosen from outside, then the essential point was that they should not be the creatures of Lafayette. No means of influencing public opinion through the press and otherwise should be neglected. Men must be gradually and insensibly brought to desire that the constitution should be amended. But at first it would be well to flatter their prejudices and to soothe their feverish susceptibility. Remedies must not be forced upon them until the intolerable misery of the malady disposed them to submit to the cure. The disease must be allowed to run its course, nay, it might even be well to increase the suffering by irritants. This last may have been honestly meant, but Mirabeau was probably well pleased to be provided with an apology for popular and even incendiary language in the Assembly. He is more likely to have been wanting in honesty than in political insight.

In February 1790 Mirabeau, who corresponded with Clarkson and Wilberforce, had delivered an eloquent

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address on the slave-trade to the Jacobin Club; but he had subsequently ceased to attend the meetings of the Society. He became a member, and in July was president of the Club of 1789, founded by Sieyès, Bailly, La Rochefoucauld, Lafayette, and other more moderate members of the Left to maintain and popularise the principles of the new constitution. But this body, the patriotism of which manifested itself in choice dinners, and which attempted to educate public opinion by expounding the principles of social and political science in a journal edited by the philosophic Condorcet, was too much controlled by Lafayette. Nor could a body so respectably superior rival in popular influence the Society of the Friends of the People (the Jacobins), to whose fervid debates the most tattered and penniless patriot was welcomed, and to which philosophic principles were but sounding commonplaces, flattering popular prejudices and justifying popular passion.

Early in October 1790 Mirabeau again began to attend the meetings of the Jacobins. He was not ill received, and he assured them that they were all dear to him, while only a few of the Club of 1789 were his friends. Many reasons probably combined to make Mirabeau draw nearer to the extreme party during the autumn of 1790. He was disappointed by the apathy which the "royal cattle," as he did not scruple to call the king and queen in a letter to La Marck, listened to his "bucolics." He was above all disgusted that, while deaf to him, they should open their ears to the mischievous suggestions of such an unscrupulous though clever knave as the pamphleteer Rivarol, and to the foolish mutterings of such an addle-brained visionary as

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the mesmerist Bergasse. "I confess," he said to La Marck, "I do not know why I go on sending these papers." Perhaps because he could not dispense with the king's money. Another reason for propitiating the Jacobins was common enmity to Lafayette, who was becoming more and more distasteful to the Triumvirate (Barnave, Lameth, and Duport), and who was suspected by the leaders of the mob of an inclination to maintain order. Mirabeau went so far as to insinuate to the queen that Lafayette had joined with Orleans in bringing the woman Lamotte to Paris, in order that the odious scandal of the diamond necklace might be revived,—a charge so improbable to any one with the least knowledge of the man, that it must have recoiled upon the inventor.

Mirabeau also needed the help of the leaders of the Left to drive the ministers from office. Necker was gone, but his colleagues remained. The general anarchy had spread to the fleet at Brest. The municipality summoned the officers to appear, gave them such orders as it pleased, and treated the authority of the admiralty and of the king with contempt. The four most important committees laid a joint report before the Assembly, recommending measures by which this state of things might be remedied and the usurpations of the local authorities checked. Mirabeau induced them also to advise that the president should demand an audience of the king and inform him that the distrust with which his ministers inspired the people was the main obstacle to the re-establishment of order. This proposal was debated first. But, although the galleries and two-thirds of the Assembly frantically

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applauded the invectives hurled from all sides at the unfortunate ministers, the result of the division (October 19) disappointed their assailants, who found themselves in a minority of 340 to 403. Many moderate members of the Left had not voted, or had deserted their party. The manifest injustice of holding the ministers responsible, when all means of action were denied them, the contempt poured on them by the Right, which was at least a proof that they were not the accomplices of the reactionists, the doubt whether their successors would be more capable, and the fear that they might be more dangerous, unwillingness to inflict a last humiliation upon the already too powerless monarch, such were among the motives which determined many.

Mirabeau's disappointment was extreme. He had urged upon the king the dismissal of the ministry, and that every attempt should be made to obtain the admission of members of the Assembly to office. The Court had done nothing. He had attempted to force the king's hand by the action of the committees. He had failed, and for once his political foresight appeared at fault. He had not spoken during the debate in the Assembly, but he gave vent to his feelings in a fiery harangue at a meeting of the Jacobins; and if he did not suggest, he at least did nothing to prevent the abandonment by the committees of every effective attempt to curb the licence of the municipality of Brest, "whose errors after all only arose from an excess of that patriotism which it would be ill-advised to discourage, when their recent victory had very probably changed the ministers from timid enemies into audacious tyrants."

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On October 21 the Assembly were asked to sanction the futile measures for the restoration of order now proposed by their committee. Among these was the substitution of the tricolour for the white ensign in the navy. A member of the Right lamented that a flag hallowed by so many glorious associations should be cast aside—"Leave," he said, "this three-coloured toy to children." Upon this Mirabeau rushed to the tribune. Such words "made his patriotism boil with a violence so great that he could not contain himself." The Right burst into laughter. "Listen to me, gentlemen, for a moment," he continued, turning to them; "before I have finished speaking you shall, I promise you, be little disposed to laugh." He reminded them that a few weeks earlier a man rash enough to show his contempt for the national colours would have atoned for his crime with his life. Practically what had been said amounted to this:—"We think ourselves strong enough to raise the white flag, that is to say the standard of the counter-revolution, in place of the odious colours of liberty." This he denounced as profoundly criminal. The beginning of his speech rose little above the commonplaces and verbiage of revolutionary oratory, but the invective which followed was terse and vigorous, and after a passage of genuine eloquence he concluded by proposing that henceforth the crews of French men-of-war, instead of shouting "God save the king," should cheer the nation, the law, and the king.

Such appeals to popular prejudice and passion, the attempt to brand his opponents as criminals and to raise the spectre of reactionary conspiracy, are hardly to be defended. Perhaps, since persuasion and argument

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had availed so little, he may have thought it would be well to try whether he could not force his services and his policy on the king and queen by exciting their alarm.

The speech on the flags, said La Marck, was bad enough, but that spoken in the Assembly after the sack of the house of the Marshal de Castries was worse. Malouet had occupied the tribune with the intention of denouncing the violence of the mob and the pusillanimous or criminal acquiescence of Bailly and Lafayette. He gave way to Mirabeau, who assured him that he was going to speak in the same sense and that he would be listened to with more patience. He either deliberately deceived Malouet, or, as he asserted, was stung by the jeers and insults of the Right into blessing what he had intended to curse. Not only did he find excuses for the rioters: he praised their loyalty and magnanimous chivalry for preserving a portrait of their king with reverent care, and for showing, while in the act of wrecking her house, the most tender solicitude and affectionate consideration for the aged Madame de Castries. A striking instance of reckless improvisation. The Duchess of Castries, as many among his audience must have known, was in Switzerland; and Mirabeau was probably as ignorant as we are whether there was or was not a portrait of Lewis XVI. in her drawing-room.

The speech on the issue of assignats had been regarded as the first pledge of Mirabeau's reconciliation with the Jacobins. He had now given further proof of his sincerity, and his popularity among the revolutionists was greater than it had ever been before. When he appeared in public, the "dauntless asserter of liberty"

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was the object of enthusiastic ovations. In the shop-fronts his portraits and busts occupied the space which had been filled by those of Necker and Lafayette. La Marck, on the other hand, dared not present himself before the justly indignant queen, while Lewis XVI. was even more estranged by the part played by Mirabeau in the debates on the civil constitution of the clergy than by his apologies for mutiny and riot.

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CHAPTER XI

Mirabeau and the Church—His understanding with Montmorin—Policy proposed by him.

THE Constituent Assembly had touched the possessions of the Church, and it had not cursed them to their face; and yet the reformers had been taught that priests clung as tightly to their wealth as they held loosely by their creed. They failed to see that this was only true of just those churchmen whose resistance and enmity might safely be despised, that it was not true of the majority of the parish clergy and of the honest and most popular minority of the episcopacy. They were misled by the assurance of the Jansenists who formed part of the Ecclesiastical Committee, that the regulations formed by it were not inconsistent with the practice of the primitive church. They forgot that this argument was not one on which the Roman Church was accustomed to look with favour, and that the Jansenist was scarcely less hated by the orthodox than the Calvinist.

It was scarcely perhaps to have been expected that they should have disregarded the words of their prophet Rousseau: "In whatever country the clergy form a distinct body, that body is master and legislator." The great majority did not wish to sever the connection between Church and State, on the contrary they hoped

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to draw it closer by converting the clergy into the paid officials of the State, elected like other officials by the people. Just as the king, when the royal domains had been seized, and he had become the "salaried delegate of the people," was expected to conform to the will of those from whom he received his wages, so also the clergy were expected to be submissive to their paymasters. Like Pombal and Joseph II. and other reforming rulers, the Constituent wished, by asserting the authority of the State over the Church, to cast down the last barriers which limited the omnipotence of the sovereign. They did not wish, by proclaiming the independence and equality of all sects, the impartiality of the State in matters of religion, to leave the one strong corporate body of the old Monarchy standing to mar the uniformity of the surface on which they meant to erect their ideal edifice.

Mirabeau, although he had brought forward in the Assembly a resolution "that the estates of the Church were at the disposal of the nation," had taken no part in framing the new constitution of the Church (May 1790). He complained confidentially to a friend, "We busy ourselves too much about the clergy, we ought to pay them and let them be"; and on another occasion, "What are you afraid of? There are no rich benefices left. There is a general feeling of indifference. Allow things to take their own course, and in thirty years there will be no more priests." It is clear therefore that he would have acted more wisely than his colleagues; but it is also clear that he at first shared their delusion as to the indifference of the people to religion. Nor did he realise the sincerity of the king's orthodoxy. Had

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he done so, he would not have lightly mentioned the abolition of celibacy as a desirable measure in his notes to the Court, nor would he have spoken of papal bulls as criminal and absurd productions.

But he awoke more quickly than others from this dream of security. In the beginning of 1791 he wrote to a friend: "We have now inflicted on ourselves a new wound and the most certain of all to mortify and to become a fresh source of gangrene, in addition to those others by which the body politic is corroded and devoured. We first set up an impotent puppet as our king, and created a legislature which administers, prosecutes, judges, rewards, punishes, in a word does everything except that which it ought to do; and now, as if our political schism were not enough, we are wantonly provoking a religious schism."

When on November 26 the Assembly was called upon to decide what measures should be taken to compel the submission of the clergy to the new organisation of the Church, he moved a decree in some respects more stringent than that proposed by the Ecclesiastical Committee, but in which no precise date was mentioned before which the clergy were to take the oath, and which therefore gave time for excitement to subside and for negotiations with Rome. But partly, as he alleged, to conceal his true object, partly to reconcile it with his care for his popularity, he introduced his measure by a most violent speech, which was vehemently applauded, and, by further inflaming the passions of his audience, contributed to defeat the motion it professed to recommend. Mirabeau himself appears to have felt that he had placed himself in a false position; and,

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remembering old triumphs, seriously thought of leaving Paris for Provence, where, especially among the turbulent population of Marseilles, every one's hand was raised against his neighbour. But his election to the presidency of the Jacobins during the first three weeks of December was a reason for postponing his departure. Another and a more weighty one was an opportunity now offered of exercising a more direct influence than heretofore on the policy of the Government.

Montmorin had been led by the moderation and prudence shown by Mirabeau as a member of the Diplomatic Committee, if not to forgive the publication of the Berlin letters, at least to believe that at such a crisis it would be a mistake to deprive the State of services which might amply atone for that old offence. Accordingly, towards the end of November, he let La Marck know that he was anxious to form a coalition with Mirabeau, and also informed him that Lafayette knew absolutely nothing of this wish. Mirabeau, who showed no eagerness to accept the minister's overtures, at length consented to visit him on the night of December 6. In a note sent to the Court on the next day he gave a full account of the interview, but it is obvious that he puts into the minister's mouth just that which he thinks likely to make the desired impression on his readers:—abuse of Lafayette, who is false to every one because he is not even true to himself; bitter criticism of the Assembly, which would in the end destroy everything, itself included; apologies for having so long held aloof from Mirabeau, the ablest man in the Assembly, a man who had both the courage to cast aside his popularity and the prudence to regain it, who had consistently upheld

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monarchical principles, and whom he now implored to assist him in saving the Monarchy and the State. Mirabeau said that after shaking hands warmly with Montmorin, of whose honesty and resolution he felt convinced, he ended the conference with a promise to assist him to the utmost of his power.

The first result of the coalition was a voluminous paper, a pamphlet, almost a book, sent by Mirabeau to Montmorin on December 23, and entitled "A sketch of the situation of France, and of the means whereby the Liberty of the People and the Authority of the Crown may be reconciled." The writer was, as might be expected, more successful in his diagnosis of the disease which threatened the existence of the Monarchy, than in prescribing a treatment by which it might be cured.

He began by pointing out the difficulties to be overcome. Among them, the indecision of the king and the great unpopularity of the queen; the growing tendency of public opinion to reject moderate views, and either to approve or to disapprove indiscriminately of all that had been done; the licence and revolutionary madness of the capital; the untrustworthiness of the National Guards; the temper and composition of the Assembly, which was liable to be carried away by waves of contagious emotion, too large to be managed, too little under the control of its leaders to be directed through them; the reactionary minority both within and without the legislature unpopular, discredited, and pursuing objects so extravagant that it could not be a useful ally; an ill-planned and half-completed constitution, any improvement in which would be decried as a reactionary attempt

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to deprive the people of the liberal institutions they had secured.

He pointed out not less clearly what ought to be the general aim of the policy of the king and of his advisers. Here also he did little more than repeat more emphatically advice previously given. He insisted that every dream of a counter-revolution must be abandoned. Even if 25 million Frenchmen could be deprived of memory, even if a whole generation could be obliterated, the state of things which existed before 1789 could not be restored. Nor need this be regretted. The levelling of old barriers and distinctions ought to be as advantageous to the Crown as it was to the nation.

He only indicates negatively the necessary changes in the constitution by pointing out some of the obvious defects. He does indeed lay down as a principle not to be lost sight of that the Assembly should legislate under the control of the king, and the king govern under the control of the Assembly. But he avoids all detail. Should the revision be carried out by the present or by a future legislature? The existing Assembly is, he thinks, besotted by parental partiality for its offspring. It might no doubt be brought to assent to partial improvements, but not to the radical corrections needed. Besides, even if by gaining the leaders of the Left the Court could secure a sufficient majority, that majority would be discredited if it included, as it necessarily must, men so justly distrusted and unpopular as the Extreme Right. But perhaps the chief objection to acting through the existing legislature was that public opinion was not yet ripe, and that unsupported by public opinion nothing could be effected. It was one of

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the most dangerous consequences of the Revolution that the people were bent on the direct exercise of sovereignty, that they looked upon their representatives as servants, whom they would follow so long as they gave satisfaction, but whom, if they attempted to turn back, they would contemptuously abandon. Yet the Assembly, although a useless ally, might prove a dangerous enemy. It must therefore be attacked in every way; nothing tending to ruin it in the eyes of the nation must be left undone. It must be tempted to persevere in every mistake. It must be lured by insidious suggestions to pass every measure likely to increase anarchy and suffering, and thus to alienate the provinces. It must even be encouraged gradually to usurp the direction of every department of State, so that undertaking to do all it might be held responsible for all. It would then be easy for the ministers to throw the blame of whatever was amiss upon the legislature, and to prepare the way for a violent reaction at the next elections.

The popularity of the king must be cultivated as assiduously as that of the Assembly is to be attacked. Lewis XVI. must exert himself in various ways, indicated by the writer, to obtain the affection and confidence of the people. The queen must convince the populace that she is neither their enemy nor the friend of the reactionists.

Mirabeau then pointed out that the private opinions of the members of those bodies into whose hands the management of public affairs had fallen, were far less extreme than their actions. Few even among the Parisian municipality were democrats at heart: it was through fear of the mob that they voted against their convictions.

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They would act very differently if the tide of popular feeling set in another direction. He had previously again and again insisted that all depended on public opinion. This had destroyed everything, and this alone could create a new order out of the ruins of the old. The paper accordingly terminates with an elaborate scheme for so forming and directing public opinion that it may not only not oppose but even demand the necessary measures.

He would cover the country with secret agents and spies, who are to prepare and disseminate a vast literature of broad-sheets, tracts, pamphlets, and books. Journalists and others who have the ear of the mob must be bribed. A careful and constant finger must be kept on the pulse of popular feeling by means of an elaborate police.

This is a very imperfect account of a paper remarkable indeed, and for nothing more than for the proof it affords that the judgment of the most clear-sighted politician may be warped by a false position and a predilection for crooked courses. There were, Mirabeau said, two dangers to be guarded against. The one was that the Assembly might venture to throw down the last weak bulwarks of the throne, openly usurp the executive power, and that it might obtain sufficient support to maintain this usurpation. The other danger was that the discontent, lawlessness, and frenzied terror of the populace might overwhelm all in a resistless flood of anarchy and violence. Would Mirabeau have believed it possible to aggravate the propension to extreme courses, the precipitate folly of the Assembly, the sufferings and disorders of the nation, and yet to

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avoid these dangers, had he not been influenced consciously or unconsciously by the wish to justify the double part he continued to play of demagogue and royalist statesman?

The plan he proposed for creating a healthy public opinion was too complicated, too costly; it depended too much on the co-operation of a number of not very trustworthy or estimable agents, on bribery and—Mirabeau himself uses the word—corruption. It is true that many Jacobins and regicides were in the future to deprive themselves of the only excuse for their crimes, by becoming the servile instruments of despotism. But the times were other, Mirabeau was not the master of victorious legions, the timid and well-meaning Montmorin was far from being a Fouché.

La Marck truly observed that such a policy as his friend sketched might have succeeded in the time of the Fronde, but in the first fever of the Revolution men's passions ran too high, the course of events swept on with too great impetuosity to be diverted by such artful and finely-balanced expedients. Nor does Mirabeau himself appear to have felt any confidence that his travelling agents, his secret police, his office for bribing journalists and publishing edifying literature, would easily or quickly turn public feeling in the desired direction. Had he believed in an imminent reaction, in the rebellion of the provinces against the dictatorship of Paris, he would not have insisted that the members of the present legislature must not be re-eligible for the next, because the most mischievous and extreme men were most certain to retain their seats; nor that candidates must in future be residents in the district they sought

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to represent, since otherwise the Desmoulins and Marats, the Dantons and Linguets, would carry all before them in the provinces.

He concluded his paper with the assurance that the adoption and successful execution of his plan offered the last and only chance of escape from general ruin. "Does not the ferocity of the mob constantly increase? Are not all means employed to inflame the popular hatred of the royal family? Is not a universal massacre of nobles and clergy openly preached? Has not mere difference in opinion come to be looked upon as a sufficient ground for proscription? Are not the towns in a state of anarchy, the peasantry expecting a promised redistribution of land? Are not the magistrates too alarmed themselves to think of protecting others, while the National Guards everywhere preside over the acts of popular vengeance? Could the frenzy and fanaticism of the National Assembly rise to a higher pitch? Unhappy nation! this is the pass to which you have been brought by a few men, who believed that intrigue could supply the place of talents, and restlessness of ideas. Excellent but weak king, unfortunate queen! This is the terrible abyss to which you have been led by vacillation between blind confidence and exaggerated distrust. One effort is still possible, but it is the last. If it be not made or if it fail, the pall of death must cover this kingdom! What is to be its fate? Whither will the vessel, riven by lightning and lashed by the whirlwind, be driven? I know not; but if I myself escape the common shipwreck, I shall say with pride—I braved destruction to save them, but they would not!"

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Mirabeau's paper was shown to the king, whose only criticism appears to have been that he thought matters were not quite so bad as the writer made out. Montmorin, on the other hand, fell in so readily with everything, that La Marck felt increased misgivings as to his capacity. Mercy-Argenteau said that what Mirabeau proposed was not amiss on paper, but would prove very difficult of execution. As indeed was the case. A month later La Marck told Mercy that the only part of the great plan which had so far been carried out was the organisation of the secret police which was to report on the condition of the capital. Montmorin had also, though La Marck does not mention this, tried to influence the Assembly by bribing some of the popular members. One certain result might be anticipated from what had already been done—a vast expense, for all the men employed expected to be glutted with gold. Mirabeau himself set the example by further demands on the king's liberality; he wished to buy Le Marais, a sumptuous country-house in the neighbourhood of Paris. La Marck in vain protested against the folly of advertising his venality. "It would be wiser," he said, "for you to buy Versailles a year hence than a cottage now."

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CHAPTER XII

Mirabeau President of the Assembly—Conference with Malouet—Not trusted by the Court—Defies the Jacobins—Policy as member of the Diplomatic Committee—Illness and death.

DURING the few remaining months of his life Mirabeau secured a position less inadequate to his genius and to his pretensions. Montmorin, whom he saw almost daily, did nothing without his advice; and in his own department of foreign affairs was little more than the secretary of his adviser. In the Assembly, more particularly after he had presided over it with a tact, a dignity, and an authority to which none of his predecessors had even approached, he obtained an influence which justified the remark of a liberal journalist that the Assembly without Mirabeau was like a monarchy without a king. Even the Right began to listen to him with attention. Out of doors his popularity had never been greater. He was followed by crowds of admirers. No provincial visitor to the capital was satisfied till he had seen, and if possible heard, Mirabeau. Dumont tells how, when he was returning from England, his postilion replied to a complaint about the horses, "Yes, those in the traces are not good for much, but my Mirabeau (the horse in the shafts which did most of the work) is excellent." His fame was nearly as great

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abroad. When the Cambridge whigs showed their sympathy with French liberalism by a public dinner, one of the first toasts was "Mirabeau and the triumph of eloquence in the cause of liberty."

Yet brilliant as his position appeared to be, it was false and insecure. He relied on his influence in the Assembly, his popularity out of doors, and his control of the policy of the Government through the king and queen and the one minister faithful to them, Montmorin. But Montmorin was timid and weak, Marie Antoinette trusted Mirabeau and liked his policy as little as ever. His popularity was attacked by Duport and the Lameths as well as by the radical press, and could only be maintained by concessions hardly to be reconciled with his principles. The growing weakness of the majority, the diminished influence of Lafayette, the disposition of many of the moderate Right, such as Cazalès, to draw nearer to him, made Mirabeau more nearly than he had ever been before the leader of the Assembly. But he had pronounced that body to be incapable of any good work: to tempt it to suicidal acts of folly, to ruin it in the eyes of the nation, was the avowed object of his policy.

The disorders in Provence culminated in a riot at Aix, during which the town was in the hands of the lowest rabble, the prisons were broken into, and victims obnoxious to the mob murdered. The last vestiges of authority and order had disappeared from Marseilles. Mirabeau, as spokesman of a committee of the Assembly, proposed that the king should be asked to send three commissioners, who should dispose of a sufficient number of troops to restore order. He hinted

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in his speech at excuses, or at least at extenuating circumstances, for crimes which he privately assured La Marck were far more atrocious than was generally known. At the same time he asked the Assembly for a month's leave of absence. To play the part of dictator at the head of the royal commission in his native province, and to turn his back for a time on the colleagues who had so repeatedly ignored his claim to the presidential chair, was tempting both to his pique and to his ambition. The Court, however, thought him more likely to be of service in Paris than in Provence, where even La Marck felt that it was uncertain what part he would play. Montmorin accordingly promised to do his utmost to procure his election as president of the Assembly on January 3. The liberal press, the Parisian sections, and the Jacobins, these last on the motion of Barnave, besought the champion of liberty not to desert the temple of the laws. Thus appeased, and with this hope, he remained.

Yet, although the minister did his best, neither on January 3 nor on January 17 was Mirabeau elected to preside over the Assembly. On the former occasion he was only defeated by three votes, on the latter date the majority against him was larger, for he had offended his conservative supporters by the violence of his language in the debates on the Church. On December 26 the king sanctioned the imposition on the clergy of an oath of conformity to the new ecclesiastical constitution. "I had rather," he said, "be king of Metz than sign. But this cannot last long." He considered his signature only another proof that he was no free agent, another justification for the future repudiation of all that had

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been done since he had been dragged a prisoner to Paris.

In a debate on January 1 Mirabeau spoke with moderation, insisting that although nonjuring priests might justly be deprived of their public functions, to molest them further was to violate the sacred principle of toleration. Three days later he discussed dispassionately some questions of detail connected with the new ecclesiastical establishment. La Marck, astonished at this moderation, asked him whether it was consistent with his policy of luring the Assembly to violent and extreme measures. Mirabeau replied that "the Assembly had already run their head into the noose. They must see the world through queer glasses if they imagine that 20,000 priests can be quietly turned out of their parishes."

The surprise of his friend perhaps encouraged Mirabeau to believe that any violence of language would be attributed by his royalist allies to subtle policy. At all events on January 14 he cast all moderation to the winds. The Ecclesiastical Committee had been asked to prepare an address to the nation explaining and justifying the policy of the Assembly. Mirabeau assured them that he had prepared the draft of such an address, and the committee accepted this production, as it seems, on trust. It was a strange medley of scraps of theology and church history supplied by Abbé Lamourette, unctuous and insincere cant and venomous insinuation. In it Mirabeau denounced "the hypocritical clamours of the enemies of the Revolution, men who hide their dark designs under specious pretences, the culpable resistance of many priests to the

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laws of their country," as well as "their efforts to restore the twofold tyranny of throne and altar"; and he concluded by saying: "A few months ago we were a people without a country, a nation without a government, a church without morality or discipline." This was too much for many even of the Left. Camus, the Jansenist, the chief deviser of the civil constitution, exclaimed in the midst of the general uproar, "We cannot listen to such things," and a large majority charged the Ecclesiastical Committee to prepare a more seemly and moderate proclamation. Mirabeau printed and published the rejected address—an act which proves that his violence was not so much intended to mislead the Assembly as to increase his popularity in the streets. After this he can scarcely have been surprised that he lost many votes in the presidential election on January 17. He was somewhat consoled by being chosen on the same day commander of the National Guards of his district, and a little later a member of the Council of the Department of the Seine.

He had reason to be gratified at obtaining a place in the governing body of the capital. Paris attracted him with the fascination of a mysterious and terrible monster. What greater triumph could there be than to bring the force which he justly regarded as the most dangerous motor of anarchy under control, and to make it the instrument of his wiser policy? The influence of Lafayette was still sufficient to prevent Mirabeau, although supported by Danton, from being chosen chairman of the Council of the Department, but when the new administrative body was solemnly received by the Assembly he was their spokesman. "We shall con-

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sider," he said, "the maintenance of public tranquillity as the first of our duties. . . . Factious men, in the hope of overthrowing the constitution, persuade the people to take action in person, as if there were neither laws nor magistrates. We shall strip the mask from these guilty enemies of public tranquillity . . . and proclaim that the proper function of private citizens is the pursuit of peaceful employments, and the practice of the social and domestic virtues."

But before these words were spoken Mirabeau had at length received from the Assembly that distinction which had been bestowed upon forty-three members before it was grudgingly granted to him, who was assuredly the most talented and renowned among the representatives of France. He was elected by a considerable majority president for the first fortnight of February 1791.

Mirabeau's iron constitution, undermined by long illness—La Marck says he had never known him enjoy a day's perfect health—and by constant labours, which he only intermitted to indulge in more deadly pleasures, was rapidly breaking up. Acute inflammation of the eyes had all but blinded him; he appeared in the Assembly his face swathed with compresses and bleeding from leech-bites; he was shaken by constantly recurring fever-fits and racked by internal pains. Even his buoyant self-confidence began to despair of the future. Yet his spirit bore up unbroken against all his sufferings, whether physical or moral, and the ascendency of his genius was never more conspicuous than when, as president of the Constituent Assembly, he extorted the admiration of even his most prejudiced opponents.

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Chateaubriand compares him to Milton's Chaos, calm and unmoved in the midst of the jarring factions of his tumultuous realm, but Mirabeau little resembled the "Anarch old with faltering speech and visage incomposed," who "by decision more embroiled the fray." René's Miltonic reminiscences might have supplied an apter parallel. The great tribune towered above his compeers like the rebel archangel in Pandemonium.

> Confusion heard his voice; and wild uproar
> Stood ruled.

Not only did he introduce a new order and dignity into the debates of the Assembly, not only in his improvised answers to deputations and on other sudden emergencies did he appear to be always able to say the right thing; the business of the Assembly was also far more rapidly dispatched under his presidency. More was done, the English ambassador wrote, in that fortnight than previously in the space of months. This conduct is not easily to be reconciled with his avowed intention of bringing the Assembly into odium and contempt, but no doubt, as Lord Gower says, it "conciliated to Mirabeau the minds of the friends of government and of the lovers of peace, who flatter themselves that his great talents may at last prove of service to his country."

Among those who began to conceive such hopes was Malouet. Although they had not spoken since the apology for the sack of the Hôtel de Castries, he was now invited by Mirabeau to an interview in the presence of Montmorin. The conference lasted from ten o'clock in the evening till two hours after midnight.

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The great plan which Mirabeau had submitted to the minister in December was discussed. The account given by Malouet of the scheme, which was, he said, placed in his hands by Montmorin, has led some historians to believe that the draft preserved by La Marck had been subsequently amplified and completed. But Malouet had a treacherous memory. There are obvious inaccuracies in this part of his reminiscences. It is therefore probable that when he enumerates the positive improvements to be introduced into the constitution—such as the creation of a second chamber, the restoration to the king of the right of absolute veto and of dissolution—he is attributing his own views to Mirabeau, who may very possibly have expressed his approval of such changes in the course of their conversation.

Mirabeau, Malouet says, at first seemed exhausted by the labours of the day and by disease. His inflamed and bloodshot eyes were starting from their sockets. His appearance was horrible. But he soon recovered his wonted energy and eloquence. "I was carried away," Malouet continues, "by his ringing voice, his lively gestures, by the cogency and fertility of his ideas. All my prejudices, all my suspicions vanished, I found myself sharing his passion, praising his plans and his courage, exalting his resources. But my last words stirred his anger. "You will best be able to repair," I said, "the evil you have done." "No," he replied, starting up. "I have done no evil willingly. I have yielded to the inevitable. The great mischief which has been done is the work of all, except the crimes which are the guilt of a few. You moderates, who were not sufficiently so to appreciate me; you ministers, who

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never took a step which was not in the wrong direction; you, foolish Assembly, who know neither what you say nor what you do, it is you who have done the mischief."

Malouet came away fully convinced of Mirabeau's sincerity. La Marck had expressed some fear to Mercy lest the growth of his friend's popularity might make the temptation to play the demagogue irresistible. But so far from this being the case Mirabeau appears to have been encouraged, by the feeling that his position was less precarious, openly to defy the radical leaders, whom he had hitherto denounced in private, but treated with civil deference in public.

Towards the end of January it was known that "Mesdames" the king's aunts intended to betake themselves to Rome, whence arose various reports and much excitement in Paris. Mirabeau pointed out, in a note for the Court dated February 3, that the princesses' journey might prove perilous to themselves and productive of many dangers to the king and queen; that the ill-disposed would look upon the departure of the old ladies as preparatory to that of the king himself; and that it would be made the pretext for a new agitation. The suspicions of the "ill-disposed" were in exact accordance with the facts. Towards the end of 1790 Lewis XVI. had assented to a plan for his escape devised by Breteuil. He was to fly secretly to Montmédy in the hope of reasserting his lawful authority with the help of his loyal subjects and of the army of Bouillé, or, at the worst, with the support of the sovereigns his allies.

La Marck, on the pretext of escorting a sister to the frontier, visited Bouillé (February 6), and explained

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Mirabeau's policy to him. Bouillé, who from the first had disliked the scheme of Breteuil, much preferred that proposed by Mirabeau, and begged the king to take it seriously into consideration. He had no high opinion of his cousin Lafayette, but he heard with pleasure that Mirabeau and Lafayette had again held a long conference (February 8). He thought that united they three might still save the Monarchy. What Mirabeau now suggested was that the departments should be induced to demand the dissolution of the Assembly, and the election of a new constituent body. He professed to be able to determine the action of thirty-six of the more revolutionary departments, and Bouillé's influence was great in six on the eastern frontier; in many of the others the royalists and the opponents of the ecclesiastical policy of the Assembly were in a majority. The king must leave Paris. It should be Lafayette's part to enable him to do so as a king and not as a fugitive. Bouillé, with his most trusty regiments, must be prepared to receive him at Fontainebleau or Compiègne.

There were no doubt many uncertain factors in this combination. Did not Mirabeau greatly overrate his influence in the provinces? Could Lafayette be induced to help the royal family to leave Paris—in other words, to destroy his own importance? And even if all went well, the prospect of a new Constituent Assembly was singularly distasteful. Breteuil's plan still appeared to the queen the simpler, the more certain, and the more attractive. But since the king and queen were determined on that secret flight to the eastern frontier condemned from the first by Mirabeau,

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Lewis XVI. could not follow his advice and forbid his aunts' journey. They must not be left at Paris as hostages in the hands of the mob. After various adventures the old ladies were finally arrested by the municipality of Arnai-le-Duc. Barnave sought to justify this flagrant violation of personal liberty by the dangerous sophism that the authorities had not broken the law, since they believed themselves to be acting for the public good. When Mirabeau advised that the matter should be left to the executive, since the princesses' journey was not forbidden by any law, "Yes, it is," shouted a member. "I can cite the law—the welfare of the nation." "The welfare of the nation," retorted Mirabeau, "requires above all that the laws should be respected." After a violent debate the course which he advised was adopted without a division.

Four days later (February 29), the committee entrusted with the preparation of a law to check emigration presented their report. Such a law, they said, interfering with personal liberty, must be unconstitutional and tyrannical, yet, in obedience to the instructions of the Assembly, they had drafted a measure which might, although oppressive, prove effectual. But since their object could not be attained without violating the constitution, did the Assembly still wish to legislate on the subject? This previous question was hotly debated. Mirabeau, in the letter of advice with which he had favoured Frederick William II. on his accession, had denounced all laws against emigration as unjust, oppressive, and futile. He did not long allow his audience to doubt whether he would have the courage to be consistent. He read the passage from

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this letter, and moved that the Assembly, convinced of the unconstitutional character of such legislation, should not ask the committee to communicate their measure. He concluded with the words: "Should you pass a law against emigration, I swear that I will never obey it." But although his influence and reputation had never been so great in the Assembly, he could not obtain a majority.

A motion was made to refer the matter to the joint consideration of all the more important committees of the Assembly. When Mirabeau, for the third time, rose in opposition, a member asked by what right he claimed to dictate to the Assembly; and the interruptions of the Extreme Left were persistent, until turning in the direction of Duport, the Lameths, and their following, he uttered in his clear and deliberate voice of calmly confident contempt the celebrated apostrophe—"*Silence aux trente voix.*" He ended his speech by proposing that, if the Assembly determined, against his advice, to adjourn their decision, they should at least decree that in the meantime no mobs be permitted to collect.

The radicals, who after this challenge looked upon Mirabeau as their declared enemy, determined to attack him that same evening in the Jacobin Club, where they felt themselves to be strongest. It has always been one of the least amiable characteristics of the French populace to be over ready to believe charges of treachery and corruption when brought against its favourites; and Mirabeau, as we have seen, even when most admired and most popular, was never wholly trusted. It had therefore been easy for Duport and his allies

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to poison during the past month the minds of the Jacobins against their late president. Enough had happened during the day to arouse a wild frenzy of angry and suspicious terror among the fanatics and the mob (February 28). The law against the refugees had been adjourned, a riot at Vincennes suppressed by Lafayette, and reports were rife of royalist conspiracies, based on the fact that a number of gentlemen, who had collected at the Tuileries to protect the king against a threatening mob, had been disarmed and roughly treated by the National Guard. Mirabeau's enemies were not without hope that the known hostility of the audience would deter him from attending the meeting of the Jacobins. But when Duport rose to denounce him, Mirabeau was sitting opposite, with impassive scornful face, as if he held the invectives of the orator and the angry cheers they excited in like disdain. Never did he prove more fully than on this last occasion his mastery of that art which he so highly prized—the art of daring (*l'art d'oser,—Virtù*, Machiavelli called it). Duport accused him and Lafayette of plotting to steal the king from Paris, as the first step towards a counter-revolution. In opposing the law against the refugees, Mirabeau had, he said, revealed his wicked design. The invective of Charles Lameth was more venomous, more personal, and far more able than that of Duport. All the follies and faults of his opponent's youth and later life, all the crimes which had been laid to his charge by calumny and senseless suspicion, were revived and shown in the most odious light. He strove to make Mirabeau appear at once contemptible and hateful. An eye-witness—a foreigner—who gives the only authentic

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account of this memorable scene, says that the relentless rancour, the impassioned malice of the speaker, the eager and cruel applause of the crowd so affected him that he was ill for several days. Mirabeau had with difficulty obtained a hearing for a short reply to Duport; when he rose after Lameth's speech howls and insults were heard on all sides, and the president tried to prevent him from reaching the tribune by declaring the meeting to be at an end. "But I soon learned," says our author, "with how little cause I had feared for this mighty spirit, which is ever greatest in extremities. He had listened to the most virulent abuse without losing his self-possession, and now his lofty composure, his dauntless courage, his fiery indignation commanded attention. The very weapons hurled against him became in his hands the means of inflicting more deadly wounds on his assailants. After he had crushed them by his eloquence, and by the ascendency of his personality, he had the self-control to pause in the full tide of victory, and casting aside all that was merely personal, he told his audience political truths such as they had seldom heard." As soon as he had ended he left the hall with the words, "Only ostracism shall separate me from you," applauded by the majority and admired by all.

Such a triumph was a striking proof of the might of Mirabeau's genius, and when we remember that he was at the time miserably ill—dying as by a slow fire, he said to Dumont—a not less striking proof of his unquenchable energy, but it could have no lasting result. His hearers were convinced against their will by his eloquence, and by the magnetism of his personal in-

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fluence, but on the next day the established and congenial sway of ignorance, fanaticism, and suspicion reasserted itself.

There was henceforward open war between Mirabeau and the Jacobin leaders. They attacked him in the Assembly, and they libelled him vigorously in the revolutionary press. He, on the other hand, persuaded the Council of the Department to warn the people in placards against those pestilent agitators who attempted to excite disorder by reports that the enemies of liberty were plotting against the constitution. "Let not the citizens allow themselves to be persuaded that the laws can be defended by being broken." What would be the issue of the struggle? Mirabeau himself was not hopeful. Dumont says that when he parted from him three weeks previously, he embraced him with unusual emotion. "I shall die before anything is accomplished, perhaps we shall not meet again. . . . The members of the Assembly have wished to govern the king, instead of to govern through him, but soon neither he nor they will govern. A vile faction will impose its yoke on both alike, and cover France with atrocities." Little or nothing had been done to influence public opinion in the provinces—an essential part of the plan proposed to the Court through Montmorin, as well as of the later scheme approved by Bouillé. Montmorin himself, though honest, was weak and undecided, and Mirabeau had no other ally except La Marck whom he could wholly trust. The self-confidence and conceit of Lafayette made an understanding with him as impossible as ever. Yet nothing could be effected against the Jacobins, the common enemy, without his co-operation.

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Mirabeau was moreover only half aware of the insecurity of his position. He did not know that, while he was risking his popularity by defying the revolutionists, he had entirely lost whatever influence he had ever possessed at Court. That he had never obtained the full confidence of the queen he knew; but La Marck imagined himself to be trusted by Marie Antoinette, and he no doubt led his friend to believe that no serious resolution would be adopted without his knowledge. Towards the end of February, Mercy wrote to Leopold II. that he feared Montmorin and Mirabeau would find that they had made their reckoning without the queen; and Bouillé was informed by Lewis XVI., a fortnight before Mirabeau's death, that he had resolved to escape to Montmédy towards the end of April. What would Mirabeau have done, had he lived to hear that the royal family had fled from Paris to seek the protection of an Austrian army? We can imagine the fiery vehemence of his indignation, the eloquence with which he would have denounced an act not less treacherous to himself than treasonable to the nation. Speaking shortly before his death of the reports which were current about the intended flight of the king, he said to his friend and physician Cabanis that, were such a thing to happen, he would be the first to propose to the Assembly that the throne be declared vacant, and a republic proclaimed. Would he, after his quarrel with the Lameths and Duport, have been able to place himself at the head of the republican party? They probably would not have rejected the overtures of a man who might be so useful as a friend, so dangerous as an enemy. But—in his own phrase—they and others in the Assembly were as little

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disposed as ever to pardon his superiority, and, if he perhaps dreamt of being the first president of a French Republic, he must have forgotten the nervous anxiety to raise a barrier which should exclude him from the ministry, the jealousy which had refused to him for nearly two years the distinction of presiding over the legislature. But the little space we have left must not be wasted in futile speculations on what might have been, when it barely permits a brief and insufficient sketch of the work done by Mirabeau as a member of the Diplomatic Committee. No other part of his political career was more fruitful of results, or proved more clearly that he possessed the best qualities of a practical statesman.

Among the majority of the Assembly abstract theories or passing fancies and emotions, vague, visionary, and inconsistent, determined the view taken of every question of foreign policy. The members of the Left alternated between dreams of a brotherhood of nations piously respecting the Rights of Man, a millennium in which selfish ambitions and war should be no more, and fearful visions of confederate tyrants, ruthless in their terror, conspiring against liberty with domestic traitors. Their one practical principle was that the will of the sovereign people and the validity of natural rights could not be limited by any treaties or international conventions.

This dogma was the more likely to lead to complications with foreign powers, because, while Lafayette seemed eager to play the part of a knight-errant of liberty wherever a people rose against their rulers, the more advanced Jacobins, honestly, perhaps,

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believing that foreign intervention must come, held that the wisest policy was to anticipate their enemies, and to carry on an active revolutionary propaganda, so that they might in the end oppose a league of peoples to the league of kings.

Mirabeau saw clearly from the first that peace was essential to enable the country to escape the most frightful convulsions, that war would destroy the last chance of saving the Monarchy. He therefore consistently endeavoured to dissuade the Assembly from measures likely to embroil France with her neighbours. In August 1790 he became a member of the Diplomatic Committee, and, as he alone had some knowledge and experience, some acquaintance with foreign countries and foreign statesmen, he soon exercised much influence over his colleagues. Even Barnave, who had said that when the people and reason ruled, diplomatic secrecy was out of date, appears to have yielded to his ascendency. To prevent any action on the part of the Assembly which would endanger peace, and to prevent the complete isolation of France, were the two objects which Mirabeau perseveringly pursued, and not without a certain measure of success.

We have mentioned (page 64) that before 1789 he had advocated an alliance with England. But, during the negotiations between England and Spain after the Nootka Sound difficulty, he obtained from the Assembly the ratification of the defensive and commercial clauses of the treaty between France and Spain. The friendship of England, he said, could only be bought by the sacrifice of French manufactures to the English spirit of monopoly, and the commercial progress which must be

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one of the first fruits of French liberty, would confirm the ill-will of the jealous islanders. It appeared important to Pitt that reliance on French help should not make the Spaniards more stubborn, and in August 1790 he sent an agent, William Miles, to persuade Lafayette and other liberal leaders that he was no enemy to the Revolution. When a few weeks later Mirabeau's influence in the Diplomatic Committee was recognised, Hugh Elliot came to Paris to convince his old friend that a better understanding between France and England would be advantageous to both countries. Elliot's mission appears to have been a complete success. In October 1790 Mirabeau spoke of England in a tone so changed, that he was accused of being the hireling of Pitt.

The English minister, his object gained, showed little disposition to make any definite proposal. Perhaps he did not wish to commit himself until he could forecast the future development of the Revolution; perhaps he shared the delusion of Burke, who thought that France had become a cipher in European politics, at the very moment when, as Mirabeau said to Mercy, it was a most dangerous volcano, needing to be very carefully watched. Miles vainly insisted that it was in the power of the English Government to exercise a most beneficent influence on the course of events in France; that an alliance with England would do much to relieve the French from that haunting dread of foreign interference which not only inflamed the frenzy of the fanatics and threatened the safety of the king and queen, but led even moderate men to shrink from resistance to extreme measures as unpatriotic. Lafayette, Barnave, and other

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leaders were, he said, not less well disposed than Mirabeau to an English alliance.

Disappointment that the hopes raised by Elliot were not realised caused Mirabeau to speak with bitterness of Pitt. Yet he did his best to avoid international complications. The German princes owning fiefs in Alsatia were impoverished by the abolition of feudal dues and loud in their complaints. The theorists in the Assembly listened with impatience to claims not based on natural rights, but Mirabeau persuaded the Diplomatic Committee to advise that ample pecuniary compensation should be offered. In the case both of Liège and of Avignon he convinced his colleagues that international obligations cannot be wholly disregarded; even though they should be hard to reconcile with the imprescriptible right of the sovereign people to determine how it shall be governed.

The constant fear of a counter-revolution brought about by foreign invasion, a fear encouraged on the one hand by the foolish confidence of the aristocrats, and on the other by the language of the revolutionary press, disturbed the public mind, and, more perhaps than anything else, increased the influence of the most violent faction. Mirabeau, as the spokesman of the Diplomatic Committee, endeavoured to show that this terror was baseless. The people had now, he said, secured their rights. Let them begin to perform their duties. One of the first of these was to have confidence in the authorities they themselves had chosen, and, until the signal of danger was given by them, not to allow themselves to be so idly alarmed. There was not one of her neighbours whom France had any just reason to fear. The aristo-

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crats who had emigrated were not a serious danger. Even the Court of Turin knew its own interest too well to support them, and what great nation was likely to espouse their vengeance, to supply them with arms and subsidies, and to lavish on their behalf the gold of its taxes and the blood of its citizens? Certainly not England, where public opinion would sweep away any minister so ill-advised as to attempt such a foolish and criminal enterprise. By these and other arguments Mirabeau (January 28, 1791) endeavoured to deliver his countrymen from the nightmare of terror which was afterwards the cause of many of the worst excesses of the Revolution.

We have seen that Mirabeau's health had been undermined for years by ailments chronic and acute, caused by as reckless a life as ever was lived by man. Drunkenness, said his brother the Viscount, was the only excess which his elder brother had left for him. Yet such was the vigour of his constitution that he lived this life to the very last. Until he knew Mirabeau, says Dumont, he had not dreamt how much could be done by one man in twenty-four hours. From seven in the morning till ten or eleven at night he did not allow himself a moment's rest, not even during his meals. No small part of his political discussions and negotiations were conducted at table. When he visited his sister, Madame du Saillant, it was to meet Cazalès and other moderate men of the Right without attracting observation. The only relaxation he allowed himself from time to time, when his long day of work was over, was to sit till daybreak supping with ladies of the ballet. He had two severe attacks of illness during the first fortnight of March

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1791. When, on March 22, it was debated whether the prince of the blood next in the order of succession should be regent, as the Constitutional Committee proposed, or whether, as some preferred, the representatives of the nation should elect the regent from among the members of the royal family, Mirabeau said that he had been too ill to give the necessary thought to the subject, and begged that the discussion might be adjourned. Cazalès pointed out that the English Parliament had adjourned a debate out of a like consideration for Fox; but the majority were less accommodating.

Mirabeau wrote to La Marck that he now for the first time felt dismay, that the existence of hereditary monarchy was at stake, that Sieyès had never before intrigued so actively. It might therefore have been expected that he would have spoken in favour of the proposal of the committee, especially as it appeared to be approved by the majority. Instead of doing so, he made, on the second day of the debate, a somewhat elaborate speech, dwelling on the disadvantages of allowing mere chance of birth to decide who shall govern the State, using arguments at least as valid against hereditary kingship as against an hereditary regency. Yet, he concluded, the question was unimportant, since neither sovereign nor regent would have much power under the new constitution. As, therefore, the proposal of the committee accorded better with the habits and prejudices of the nation, he should give it his support. He argued, as Brissot said, white and concluded black. M. de Loménie sees in this strange inconsistency a proof of failing powers, but Mirabeau's intellect remained vigorous to the end, and

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the more probable explanation seems to be that he was determined by some subtle calculation, by one of those *à part de finesse* which, according to La Marck, made it at times so difficult to forecast his action. Nor is Mirabeau's conduct the only mystery in this debate. The reasons which induced Maury, the fearless and uncompromising champion of monarchy, to vote in favour of an elective regency are equally obscure.

Mirabeau's exertions in a debate which lasted three days and a reckless orgy aggravated his disease. He passed the night of March 26 in a villa he possessed at Argenteuil, trusting that the purer air might restore his strength for the next day, when the laws regulating the mining industry were to be finally discussed and passed. The fortune of La Marck, a large proprietor of mines, was at stake. During the night he suffered pain so intense that he several times fainted. Yet on the next day he persisted in driving to the Assembly. On the way he called at La Marck's house, who begged him to give up all idea of attending the debate, his appearance was so ghastly, his exhaustion so obvious. "No," he said, "were I not to go those men would ruin you." During the debate he spoke at great length and with his usual energy, sacrificing, said Lafayette, what remained in him of life to his friendship. It was with difficulty that his doctor, Lachèze, supported him to his carriage and brought him back to La Marck. As he sank fainting on a sofa, "Your case," he said, "is won, but I am dying." Lachèze accompanied him to Argenteuil. During the night he obtained some rest, but in the morning his sufferings increased. He wished to be treated by Cabanis, the brother-in-law of Condorcet,

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who was equally celebrated as a physician and a wit, and with whom he had of late become intimate. He therefore returned to his house in the Chaussée d'Antin, and was so revived by a hot bath that he ventured in the evening to the Italian opera, to be driven back to his bed by a more violent paroxysm. In four days he was dead. He was only in his forty-second year, and his activity and energy, continuing to the last, made his death appear as sudden as it was unexpected. It is not therefore surprising that rumours of poison should have spread at a time when everybody and everything were suspected, although the doctors were convinced that there was no symptom not to be accounted for by natural causes. Indeed, that he should have lived so long, and not that he should have died, was the greater wonder. No deathbed was ever more carefully watched, more minutely described. Cabanis chronicled both the symptoms of his patient and the sayings of his friend. La Marck, Frochot, and the "adopted son" are copious in detail.

La Marck relates that on a former occasion, when Mirabeau was describing with impulsive eloquence some dramatic deaths of ancient and modern times, he himself objected that those famous deaths seemed to him less admirable than the resigned courage with which he had seen men, too humble to be sustained by affectation or hope of fame, meet an obscure fate in the field or hospital. Three days before his last Mirabeau asked him to go through his papers, and, destroying the rest, to take charge of those—the notes for the Court more particularly—which might help to justify his conduct to posterity. After La Marck had done what was desired,

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he returned to the sick-room and was sitting by the fire, when Mirabeau held out his hand and, alluding to their former conversation, said, "Well, my dear critic of courageous deaths, are you satisfied?" Tears prevented La Marck's reply, and the dying man pressing his hand told him in affectionate and touching terms how much his friendship had been to him.

But no one, as Talleyrand remarked, ever dramatised his death more than Mirabeau, or was more sustained during his last hours by the exciting consciousness of playing a part before a vast and sympathetic audience. And yet no one was ever more the same man to the last instant than he; for the habit of posing, of arranging all he said and did, of draping his virtues and even his vices for effect, had become second nature. Surely no unearthly phantasms danced, as Carlyle imagines, their torch-dance round his soul. His intellect, except during some intervals of delirium, remained as calm and unclouded as ever in the tribune of the Assembly. The energy of his will triumphed over the agony of his body, and enabled him to converse on public and private business with his friends, as well as to coin and utter, from time to time, short and sententious sayings, emphatic commonplaces, but well calculated to strike the popular imagination and to live in men's memories. To Cabanis he said, "You are a great physician, but there is one greater than you—the author of the wind that subdues all, of the water that penetrates and fertilises all, of the fire that vivifies and dissolves all"; and on the last morning, as the sun rose, "If that is not God, it is at least his brother," and then, "I shall die to-day. When we have come to that, nothing remains

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but to perfume ourselves, to crown ourselves with flowers, and, surrounded by music, to enter as pleasantly as we can into the sleep from which we shall never awake."

Hearing the distant sound of cannon, he asked, "Are the funeral rites of Achilles already begun?" To Frochot, who was supporting him, "Yes! raise that head; would that I could bequeath it to you!" And when he was told of some new disturbance, "I carry in my heart the pall of the Monarchy. After my death its remains will be the spoil of the factious."

We have seen how often in sincerer moments he had bewailed the errors of the past—"What could I not have done," he had said not long before, "had I come to the States-General with the reputation of Malesherbes!" But now on his deathbed, when the contrast between what was and what might have been must have haunted his thoughts, there was no word of regret for past faults or lost opportunities. A confession of failure would not have been in harmony with the effect he sought to produce. In a character which he once wrote of himself he said that, if you would have men think much of you, you must persuade them that you are infallible.

M. Alfred Stern remarks that Mirabeau might well have said, and perhaps in a more literal sense than the dying Augustus, "Applaud me if I have acted my part well." He died almost in the presence of the nation to whom he acted. His faithful friends and his secretaries were constantly about his bed. Talleyrand, the Berlin letters at length forgiven, came more than once. The house was thronged by anxious inquirers. Twice a day the king sent publicly, and privately even more often. The Jacobins forgot their grudges, and Barnave was

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among the deputation sent to express their anxiety and sympathy. Not so the Lameths. I knew them, said Mirabeau, to be without adroitness, but I did not imagine them to be fools! In the street there was the impressive silence of a vast crowd, anxiously waiting for the bulletins which were circulated every three hours, or communicating in low whispers the last rumours of what the sick man had said or done.

Madame du Saillant was near her brother when he died, but, as it would seem, no other member of his family. His brother the Viscount, whom, forgetting sarcasms and libels, he had more than once endeavoured to protect at the risk of his own popularity, had crossed the frontier. His uncle the Bailli, after watching events in Provence, was soon to seek a refuge at Malta, where he died in 1793. The wretched Marchioness of Mirabeau, whose sordid fortunes were at their lowest ebb, complained in a royalist newspaper that she had been driven from the door of her dying son. It was, however, believed that not the mother but the importunate creditor had been excluded.

When Mirabeau's death was known, the grief and consternation were almost universal. No prince or king was ever so generally lamented by all classes and by all parties. Only those who hoped for a counter-revolution and those who wished to perpetuate anarchy, a small minority of extreme men, rejoiced that the most formidable opponent of reaction and disorder should be no more.

Mirabeau desired in his will that his body should be laid "in the chapel of his house at Le Marais," and that the remains of his father and grandfather should also

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be brought there. It was characteristic that he should speak of an estate, the first instalment of the purchase-money of which had not been and could not be paid, as if absolutely his own. His was to be no such quiet resting-place. Nor, had the choice been offered to him, can we doubt that he would have preferred a funeral the like of which France had never seen and a tomb in the Pantheon, even with the knowledge that three years later he would be cast out, to make place for the blood-stained corpse of Marat, who now was calling on the people to rejoice that there was one scoundrel the less on earth, since the infamous Riqueti had departed.

The National Assembly, the ministers, Lafayette at the head of his National Guards, the Council of the Seine, the municipality, the Jacobins — for even Robespierre lamented "the illustrious patriot" — thousands of private citizens, formed part of the vast procession which followed the bier on which was borne the one great man of the Revolution the one man whom his countrymen instinctively felt to have possessed the genius which might have swayed that mighty and mysterious force this way or that, and whom they united to lament because each party believed that he would have guided it in the direction of their hopes.

The many sorrowed for the fearless champion of liberty who on the memorable 23rd of June had opposed the commands of the monarch in the name of the sovereign people, who, while the Bastille was still standing, defied and denounced a reactionary government, and who had never ceased to declare that come what might the old abuses should never be restored. The Jacobins grieved for the defender of assignats and

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of the civil constitution of the clergy. The constitutional liberals lamented the statesman who had shown his moderation in the debates on the veto, on the right of peace and war, on the law against emigration. The more moderate members of the Right regretted that the man whom they had feared and hated as their most dangerous enemy should have died at the very moment when they hoped that he was about to become their most useful friend.

Certainly the contrast between Mirabeau distrusted and shunned at the opening of the Estates as a dishonourable adventurer, and Mirabeau followed to the grave within less than two years by a mourning nation, is striking, but not more striking than the contrast between the reverent pomp with which he was laid in the Pantheon and the careless indignity with which, three years later, his uncoffined remains were cast out to mingle with the nameless mould in some corner of a desecrated graveyard.

It is probable that the popularity of the living Mirabeau would have waned not less swiftly than that of the dead. He would have been crushed under the hopes which he must have disappointed. He had to a great extent bought his popularity by heavy draughts payable in the future. He died before they fell due, and was sincerely lamented by all who held his paper. Had he lived we cannot say how each individual creditor would have fared, whether some would have been paid in full, while the claims of others were wholly repudiated, or whether a moderate composition would have been offered to all. But one thing is certain, that his capital would have proved even more unequal to meet the demands

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upon it than he himself supposed. "Not the least of Mirabeau's talents," wrote a Parisian journalist on the day of his funeral, "was the gift of doing everything in season. He has given a proof of this at the last. He could not have chosen a better time to die."

THE END

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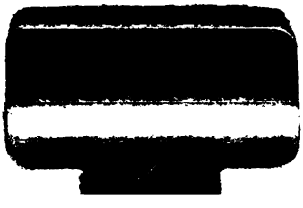

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